“I AM A RARITY IN MY SCHOOL”:
HIDDEN OBSTACLES FOR AFRICAN AMERICANS IN
GIFTED EDUCATION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study was conducted to examine the meaning, context, and process by which gifted African American students form their perceptions of gifted education. In addition, this study investigated these students’ attitudes towards school counselors and school counseling services. Given the sparse research on gifted African American students, this study was exploratory in nature. The sample comprised 12 14-year-old students (i.e., seven females and five males). These students attended public schools throughout the southeastern and midwestern regions of the United States. Five major themes emerged from the analysis of the data: (a) critical issues facing gifted African American students; (b) navigating perils; (c) benefits of gifted identification; (d) perceptions of non-gifted students; and (e) perceptions of school counselors. Practical applications for educators (i.e., teachers, administrators, and school counselors) and parents are also included.
DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to my mother and grandmother,

Deborah Ann Henfield and Dora Ethel Brown,

for shaping me into the man I am today.
The value of male role models in the lives of little black boys is well understood. Unfortunately, due to the untimely death of my father, I was forced to grow up without such a powerful figure. Nevertheless, between my mother and grandmother, I was still taught many life lessons. My mother is the most giving person that I know. My father passed away when I was three months old. From that point, forward she learned to endure under dire circumstances. Even though she has encountered many difficulties in her life, she has always given to those in need. I do not know how she does it, but I truly respect this quality about her, and I always try my best to replicate this about her. My grandmother is the epitome of love. Every decision she makes is based upon the love and respect she has for God and family. When others would not have anything to do with me, she stood her ground and helped raise me. She is my heart and soul. My goal in life is to make her proud. I learn by watching my mother and listening to my grandmother. I find myself becoming more like them by the moment.

I wish to thank my love, Cicely Taylor, who has come into my life and blessed me in so many ways. Although our relationship has been “on again-off again” for many years, she has and will always hold a special place in my heart. Cicely has repeatedly gone above and beyond to make my life more enjoyable and, more importantly, less stressful. I will never forget the time she put her life on hold for months to take care of
my mother after heart surgery. If not for her, I may have had to quit school and quite possibly, never return. Very few people I know would have done that for me. It is something I will never forget. She makes me strive to be a better person and has completely earned my faith and trust.

Next, I would like to thank the members of my committee. I am forever indebted to Dr. Demerath for exposing me to cultural anthropology and qualitative research methods. Learning under his tutelage totally changed the direction of my career. Dr. Wood came along at the perfect time in my life. He was open and honest about his likes, dislike, strengths, as well as his weaknesses. I really appreciated his openness. Whether it was staying in his office with me until 1 a.m., or talking about the real life behind the scenes of the professoriate, he always made me feel like I was on his level and I will always respect him for that. He made me feel as though he cared. I could fill this entire document with my thoughts and feelings pertaining to Dr. Moore. He is my mentor. To this day, I gauge my career success according to the gold standard he has raised. On a personal level, he is the only male role model I have ever had in my life. His stern guidance helped me to withstand the mental, physical, and emotional stress that has come to personify my doctoral experience. I owe him so much more than he realizes.

I have to thank my sister, Khadijah Henfield, and my two wonderful boys, Andrez and Asa, for motivating me to be a great role model. I am extremely hard on them, but it is only because my expectations are so high. They have the potential to
surpass all of my academic accomplishments if they maintain the put their minds to it. I look at the three of them and I have confidence that there is hope for the future.

Next, I’d like to thank my dearest friends. My dear fraternity brothers, Frank Ancrum and Cedric Harrison were so thoughtful, encouraging, and entertaining throughout this entire process. I don’t have any brothers but, if I did, I would want them to be exactly like Frank and Cedric. We debated everything from gender, race, and class issues to who we think will last to the end on “Flavor of Love.” They challenged my beliefs and made me work hard to defend them, which forced me to grow. They allowed me to be myself. I don’t think I will ever have friends whom I treasure as much as these two gentlemen. They are like the brothers I never had. My buddy, Dr. Sheila Witherspoon, has been there for me through it all. We have listened to each other gripe and complain for years! I am now a part of the Ph.D. club and I owe a lot of it to Sheila for allowing me to vent my frustrations from time to time. Last but certainly not least, there is Ms. Dollie Curry, who to this day, remembers the first conversation we ever had. To me, that is a testament to the value she attaches to dialogue. I love that about her. Aside from that, Dollie was the first friend I made in Columbus and the only one with whom I keep in contact. In hindsight, I now realize how much she did to help me navigate the system and stay on course. She was the only person I felt I could depend on. I wish that I would have done more to let her know that I appreciated her. People like her come along once in a lifetime.

I must also recognize everyone involved with the Belin Blank Gifted and Talented Center (BBC), particularly Rachelle Hansen, who contributed so much to the
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Lastly, I would to thank God, with whom all things are possible. No one, including myself, thought I would accomplish all that I have thus far. I owe it all to Him.
VITA

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PUBLICATIONS


FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Education
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

To successfully transition from school to a more technologically advanced world of work, students need to be adequately prepared academically, particularly in math and science (Bush, 2006; Flowers & Moore, 2003; Hrabowski, 2003; Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000; Moore, 2006). Speaking to this point, President George Bush (2006), in his State of the Union Address, stated:

…we need to encourage children to take more math and science, and to make sure those courses are rigorous enough to compete with other nations. We made a good start in the early grades with the No Child Left Behind Act, which is raising standards and lifting test scores across our country. Tonight I propose to train 70,000 high school teachers to lead advanced placement courses in math and science, bring 30,000 math and science professionals to teach in classrooms, and give early help to students who struggle with math so they have a better chance at good, high-wage jobs. If we ensure that America's children succeed in life, they will ensure that America succeeds in the world. Preparing our nation to compete in the world is a goal that all of us can share.

Judging from this seemingly urgent call, by the U.S. president, to increase the teaching workforce in the fields of math and science, it is apparent that increased academic achievement in rigorous coursework is increasingly becoming a major area of concern in the United States. Indeed, technological advancements, increasing globalization, and rapidly changing demographics are powerful forces that have spurned the need for more qualified students, ready to join a new-age workforce in need of talented employees.
In the last decade or so, many social scientists have maintained that the U.S. desperately needs to attract nontraditional students, such as African Americans, into technical and advanced coursework (i.e., science, technology, engineering, and math) at all phases of their education in order to meet the need for a highly skilled workforce (Flowers & Moore, 2003; Hrabowski, 2003; Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000; Moore, 2006). According to Moore (2006), “underrepresented students’ academic performances at the various stages of the educational pipeline (e.g., elementary, middle, and high school) and choice of academic majors at the college level have broader social and economic implication in the United States” (p. 246). In other words, the future success of our nation depends on ethnic minority students’ level of educational attainment (Mau, 1995).

Unfortunately, African Americans are underrepresented in undergraduate and graduate math and science degree programs (Hrabowski, 2003; Moore, 2006; Moore et al., 2004; Moore, Madison-Coleman, & Moore, 2002). Additionally, these students have been found to consistently underachieve at all levels of the educational pipeline (i.e., at elementary, secondary, and postsecondary levels; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Jencks & Phillips, 1999). According to Brown and Trusty (2005), career success is intertwined with academic success, and others (Jackson & Moore) have argued that level of education, in large part, determines the degree of advancement one will have in American society. Therefore, the underrepresentation of African Americans in fields requiring advanced coursework (Hrabowski & Maton, 1995; Moore, 2006; Moore et al.,
2004) should come as a surprise, when more research is being conducted on African American academic underachievement and low achievement.

In American society, public schools are central to the educational socialization process for students. They not only develop students’ literacy but also provide opportunities for enhancing social mobility (Flowers & Moore, 2003; Hrabowski, 2003; Maton, Hrabowski, & Schmitt, 2000; Moore, 2006; Smith-Maddox, 1999). It has been noted in the research literature that the future of our nation’s economy depends on a higher level of educational attainment by “those at the bottom of the economic ladder” (Mau, 1995, p. 73). Unfortunately, African Americans have been one of the most educationally disenfranchised members of our society and are consistently underperforming academically in comparison to their White peers (Jencks & Phillips, 1999). In the field of education, this phenomenon is most often referred to as the “Black-White achievement gap” or simply the achievement gap.

With this in mind, Brown and Trusty (2005) posited that “academic development and career development are inexorably tied to one another….Education problems are career problems, and educational successes are very likely career successes” (p. 57). Toward this end, research indicates that many African American students are not receiving the educational training necessary for employment that requires higher levels of educational attainment (Moore, 2006; Rothstein, 2004). For example, according to the United States (U.S.) Census Bureau (2004), 17.3% of African American students received a bachelor’s degree or higher in 2004, compared to 28.3% of their White peers. In public schools in America, there are many gifted African
American students who have the potential—if it is maximized—to achieve future success in the world of work. By challenging themselves with rigorous coursework and using their training to secure highly valued positions, these students will be doing both themselves and the U.S. a tremendous service (Bush, 2006; Mau, 1995; Moore, 2006). However, gifted African American students must overcome considerable obstacles—greater than their gifted White peers, in many cases—in order to reach their goals (Ford, 1996). As a result, our nation’s schools have found it considerably more difficult to recruit and retain African American students in gifted programs, which is a tremendous loss of talent.

Although African American students are highly underrepresented in gifted education programs designed to prepare students for highly desirable future occupations, much of the public educational discourse has focused on the cause for overall discrepancies in educational attainment between low and high socioeconomic status students, as well as between minority and non-minority students as a whole. Consequently, measures have been taken to close the academic achievement gap between African American and White students, yet the gap still exists. Closing the Black-White achievement gap is a lofty goal, however, its importance is underscored by the impact that its closing could potentially serve with regard to ensuring racial equality (Jencks & Phillips, 1999; Peterson & Greene, 1999). However, to make substantial progress toward this goal, collaborative efforts by those involved with and affected by the educational process are needed.
One such effort is the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; U.S. Department of Education, 2001), which mandates states to meet minimum academic performance standards by establishing state-selected, high-quality testing systems to assess the progress of third through eighth grade students in reading and math. The focus of this legislation suggests that holding schools more accountable for the performance of their students is the key to overcoming disparities in educational outcomes. In other words, NCLB appears to function under the basic premise that all students are equal and that all students will achieve at high levels if provided with increases in targeted in-school resources. According to recent studies, such as those by Hallinan (2001) and Renzulli (2005), an unquestioned belief in this premise is a potential barrier to closing the Black-White achievement gap, because it fails to take the discrepancies of out-of-school resources, such as levels of parental involvement and socioeconomic status into consideration.

Toward this end, the achievement gap between African American and Caucasian students is not confined to kindergarten through twelfth grade educational contexts. African Americans males, for example, have been highly underrepresented in postsecondary enrollment for quite some time and are even more underrepresented within the ranks of college students majoring in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM; Hrabowski, 2003; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Moore, 2006). Considering the extraordinary opportunities for advancement and monetary compensation for students who graduate with degrees in STEM majors (Bush, 2006; Moore), the lack of African American representation in these and other professional fields is of great
concern. However, generally speaking, it has not been empirically substantiated that increasing school accountability will increase African Americans’ academic achievement or college attendance. For example, Goldrick-Rab and Mazzeo (2005) state:

…there is limited evidence that school accountability, particularly as practiced under NCLB, will serve to either increase or decrease college participation. It seems far more likely that, in its current form, the accountability provisions of NCLB will have little long-term effect on college participation at all, failing to increase the odds among those already likely to attend and failing to decrease the odds amongst those unlikely to attend. Those in the middle—the students on the margin between attending and not attending college—are those most likely to be affected, but outcomes for this group are especially unclear (p. 120).

By creating programs that focus on increasing school accountability as a sufficient means of closing the achievement gap, educational policymakers may unintentionally ignore other factors (i.e., poor health, poor housing, etc.) that have been found to have a powerful influence on African American students’ ability to achieve academically.

In many American public schools, African American students face numerous issues that inhibit their academic achievement, career aspirations, and personal-social growth, thus contributing to the achievement gap. According to Ford (1996), “it is an unfortunate reality that many schools permit some degree of marginality among students – that is, a disconnection between students and the conditions designed for learning” (p. 4). For example, in 1998, it was found that African American students were less likely than their White counterparts to take advanced mathematics courses and some advanced science courses, and, in 2003, fewer eighth grade African American students took algebra courses than both their White and Latina/o peers (Achieve, 2005b). Additionally, in 2003, it has been reported that fewer eleventh and twelfth
grade African American students took Advanced Placement (AP) courses than both White and Latina/o students. In one research study conducted with over 1,500 recent high school graduates, more than 80% reported that the more rigorous their high school-level courses, the more prepared they were for college-level coursework (Achieve, 2005c). These findings suggest that African American students may not be as well-prepared for college as some of their peers, given their relative underexposure to advanced-level coursework, which research has determined to be necessary for success in college and the world of work (Achieve, 2005b; Trusty, 2002).

Although educational statistics pertaining to African Americans as a whole are cause for concern, gifted African American students have nonetheless been identified as an untapped resource whose potential has yet to be maximized (Ford, 1996). Unfortunately, the recruitment and retention of gifted ethnic minority students continues to be problematic for public school systems throughout the U.S. (Ford, 1998; Grantham, 2004a; Passow & Frasier, 1996), resulting in many of these students reaching only a fraction of their academic potential. Moreover, the research literature is replete with articles, books, and reports documenting the phenomenon of high-achieving ethnic minority students who have the ability to pursue a higher education, yet do not enroll in college for numerous reasons (Jordan & Plank, 2000; Plank & Jordan, 1996). The educational outcomes in terms of cost to society, are substantial losses of collegiate and professional talent, which the U.S. sorely lacks and desperately needs (Bush, 2006; Moore, 2006). However, in order for society’s need for talent to be met, it is incumbent
upon educators to gain a better understanding of the African American talent loss phenomenon at multiple points along the educational pipeline.

Every year on college campuses across the country, tremendous efforts are being waged to recruit and retain ethnic minority students. For example, according to Jabobi, colleges and universities have been promoting mentoring relationships for undergraduate students as a means to “improve student’s levels of academic achievement, assist students at risk for attrition to graduate, feed the pipeline to graduate schools and the professoriate, and humanize large and impersonal institutions (Jacobi, 1991, p.526). Nevertheless, 15 years after the publishing of the aforementioned quotation, institutions of higher learning continue to find difficulty in attracting and graduating African American students, particularly into degree paths requiring advanced coursework (Hrabowski & Maton, 1995; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Moore, 2006). Sadly, very few African American students—even those with strong high school academic records in honors math and sciences, solid Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) scores pursue this path. Moreover, those who do decide to major in these types of fields, often underachieve or quickly change their major (Hrabowski & Maton).

Given this unfortunate reality, it may be quite easy for some to lay sole blame on educators in higher education settings. However, it must be noted that this terrible educational issue has had its roots firmly entrenched at earlier points along the educational pipeline for quite some time. For example: (a) in 1982, Black high school graduates completed more academic courses than in 1998. Furthermore, in 1998, their academic credit totals remained lower than their White counterparts, but their
vocational credit totals were higher; (b) in 1998, Black students are less likely than their White counterparts to take advanced mathematics courses and some advanced science courses; (c) in 2000, fewer twelfth grade Black students took Advanced Placement (AP) examinations than both their White and Hispanic counterparts; (d) in 2003, fewer 8th-grade African American students took algebra courses than both their White and Latina/o peers; (e) in 2003, it has been reported that fewer eleventh and twelfth grade African American students took Advanced Placement courses than both White and Latina/o students (Achieve, 2005a; 2005b; NCES, 2003) As such, educators in these settings must share some of the blame for the underrepresentation and low performance of African American students in K-16 educational settings.

Nevertheless, educators (i.e., teachers, school counselors, administrators) and parents have the ability to exact change and work towards reversing such a horrible trend. School counselors, especially, are one of the few educational professionals in the school building who are trained to create and manage programs that enhance the academic success, career development, and personal/social growth of all students as a function of fulfilling the mission of schools (American School Counseling Association [ASCA], 2003). As such, school counselors seem to be the ideal candidates within a school to work effectively with gifted African American students. Unfortunately, school counselors have, too often, received little or no training in meeting the needs of gifted students (Colangelo, 2002; Colangelo & Davis, 2003). Thus, counseling gifted students has not been at the forefront of the educational and counseling discourse (Colangelo, 2002; Ford, 1995) Given the strikingly sparse information in the research literature
pertaining to gifted African Americans (e.g., school counseling of gifted African Americans), it appears that school counselors have had little or no training in recruiting and retaining gifted African American students for coursework and programs designed to meet their unique personal/social, academic, and career needs.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

Given the dearth of research pertaining to gifted African American students, this study was designed to help educators—and other stakeholders—better comprehend the unique experiences of African Americans in gifted education programs. More specifically, this study explored the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of these students regarding educators, particularly school counselors. In addition to offering valuable information, the study was designed to render findings that would assist in-service and pre-service educators, particularly school counselors, with effectively working with this student population.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Over four decades, gifted education has been a topic of interest in the research literature for (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Ford, 1996; Landrum, 1987; Renzulli, 1978). However, in a review of the gifted education literature, Ford (1998) found in the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) database that only 5% of the articles between 1966 and 1996 focused on gifted African American students. In a more recent review, Ford et al. (2002) reported that less than 1% of over 2,500 gifted journal articles focused on African American students. Until recently, more research and scholarship on this topic has been published (Ford & Moore, 2004; Ford et al., 2002; Moore et al.,
It is significant because it is one of the few to explore gifted African American students to report their perceptions of gifted education. More specific to the field of gifted education, this study, from the perspective of gifted African American students, provides valuable information to educators—teachers, administrators, and school counselors.

Because of the scarcity of research on the aforementioned topic, there is little information available that addresses the meaning, context, and process by which these students form their perceptions of educators, particularly school counselors. However, this is not uncommon in educational research. Far too often, the voices of ethnic minority students have been ignored in the research literature that addresses critical issues faced by these students (Fernandez, 2002). “Consistently, the focus of reform is on what adults and schools should do to improve student achievement, with students treated as passive subjects who can easily be molded to conform to our expectations” (Noguera, 2003, p. 454). As a result of such practices, educators—teachers, school counselors, and administrators—are left with an incomplete picture of the educational experiences of gifted African Americans, frequently, only the stories of those in power—the educators—are being told.

If educators (e.g., school counselors) are to be leaders and agents of change in the lives of all students (ASCA, 2003), it is critical that those in the field of education gain considerable knowledge from all students whom they profess to lead and whose lives they hope to change. “The uniqueness of the gifted renders them particularly vulnerable and requires modifications in parenting, teaching and counseling in order for
them to develop optimally” (Columbus Group, 1991, p. 36). In response to the lack of training in gifted education for pre-service and in-service educators (Colangelo & Davis, 2003), specifically gifted African American students (Ford, 1995), this study provide valuable information to prospective and current educators—teachers, school counselors, and administrators—in their attempts to increase the recruitment and retention of gifted African American students. However, this study did not only explore gifted African American students’ perceptions of school counselors and their utilization of school counseling services. It also rendered findings applicable to other individuals (i.e., teachers, school counselors, administrators, and parents).

According to the ASCA (2003), “the ASCA National Model represents what a school counseling program should contain…” (p. 15). However, without a full understanding of what students perceive to be “useful” services, school counselors are in danger of offering services that may not be utilized by some students. These students may ignore school counselors or attempt to meet their needs elsewhere or, even worse, have their needs go unmet. Either way, these choices can have a negative impact on their present and future outcomes. An awareness and understanding of gifted African American students’ perceptions of school counselors and the services they provide can aid school counselors in meeting the needs of all students. With such information, school counselors are in a better position to advocate for themselves and the field of school counseling as a whole. Furthermore, educators in general, will be in a better position to help these students (i.e., teach, advise, counsel, etc.).
1.4 Research Questions

Due to a dearth of research on gifted African American students, this study was exploratory in nature. The aim was to gain a better understanding of gifted African American students’ experiences with gifted educational programming and their perceptions of educators, such as school counselors. The current study not only rendered data on gifted African American students. Towards this end, it also provided information related to their race, gender, and giftedness. Aligned with the intent of this study, the research questions were as follows:

1. How do African American students perceive being gifted?
   a. How do these perceptions differ on the basis of gender?

2. How do gifted African American students perceive educators, such as school counselors?
   a. How do these perceptions differ on the basis of gender?

1.5 Limitations of the Study

For the present study, the researcher chose to utilize qualitative methods because of the lack of research pertaining to gifted African Americans and their perceptions of educators, such as school counselors. There is a tremendous need for increased understanding of the educational experiences of gifted African American students as told by them—the ones whose experiences are in question. This notion is strongly supported by Fernandez (2002). More specifically, he asserts: “What gets left out, then, if we do not hear students’ voices? How complete of a picture can we get about…education if we rely only on the dominant (school) discourse?” (pp. 45-46).
Therefore, it is impossible to get a complete picture of education without hearing the voices of the students. As such, qualitative methodology was useful for obtaining in-depth information pertaining to the phenomena in question.

The participants in this study were located in various cities throughout the midwestern and southeastern regions of the U.S. and could not be met in one location to conduct face-to-face interviews. Therefore, interview data were collected using electronic methods, specifically AOL Instant Messenger™, which the literature has found to be effective for interview data collection (Moore & Flowers, 2003). Nevertheless, it has also been documented that conducting interviews on-line prevents researchers from analyzing participants’ body language, facial expressions, and voice tone during an interview (Flowers & Moore, 2003). Nevertheless, the researchers found the convenience of online data collection to be a greater asset than its limitations.

1.6 Definition of Terms

_Gifted_

In the current study, gifted referred to students who demonstrate evidence of high performance in academic areas. These students required services or activities not ordinarily provided by the school in order to fully develop such capabilities and were enrolled in a gifted education program in their respective school.

_Perceptions and Attitudes_

According to Purkey and Novak (1996), perceptions are a reference point for behavior that influences the memories people use to understand the present and anticipate the future; they affect the possibilities that people can imagine and the goals
that they are willing to work toward. Closely related, Gardner (1975) described attitudes (albeit toward science) as follows: “we may regard a person’s attitude to science as a learned predisposition to evaluate in certain ways objects, people, actions, situations, or propositions involved in learning science” (p. 2).

_School Counselor Utility_

Utility referred to usefulness. School counselor utility referred to gifted African American students’ perceptions of the degree to which they found school counselors’ services useful.

_African American and Black_

The two terms were used interchangeably to represent people of African descent.

_European American, White, and Caucasian_

The two terms were used interchangeably to represent people of European descent.

_Underachievement_

According to Colangelo (2002), underachievement is a discrepancy between assessed potential and actual performance. He submits that the discrepancy may be between two standardized instrument assessments or between a standardized instrument assessment and academic achievement as assessed by student performance in the classroom. For the purpose of the current study, the latter definition was used to define underachievement. In other words, underachievement is defined as high achievement.
scores on standardized tests with lower than expected academic performance in the classroom.

*Overachievement*

Overachievement is defined as low achievement scores on standardized tests with higher than expected academic performance in the classroom.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The current review of the literature addresses salient topics designed to provide the reader with sufficient information needed to contextualize the research study. Critical Race Theory (CRT) was used as the theoretical framework for the study; accordingly, race and gender were highly emphasized throughout. Given that this study concentrated on African American students and their experiences in school, any such discussion would have been a major shortcoming without a focus on the achievement gap that continues to plague our nation’s schools. Thus, the research literature review (a) defines the achievement gap, (b) details the current state of the achievement gap, (c) provides explanations for the existence of the achievement, and (d) illustrates what has been successful (and unsuccessful) in decreasing the achievement gap.

After reviewing the achievement gap literature, the focus shifts to the topic of gifted African American students. As noted in Chapter I, taken as a whole, the research literature on gifted African American students is somewhat scant. Based on the extant literature on gifted African American students, three primary categories have been addressed: (a) the underrepresentation of African American students (Patton & Townsend, 1997); (b) social, cultural, and psychological factors that affect gifted African American students’ performance (Ford, 1996; Ford-Harris, Schuerger, Harris,
and, (c) perceptions of African American students regarding gifted education (Flowers et al. 2004; Grantham, 2004b; Grantham & Ford, 1998; Moore et al., 2005a; Moore, 2005b). These three areas were addressed to provide a general description of the factors that distinguish the experiences of gifted African American students from the experiences of non-gifted students. In the context of this discussion, the specific and unique challenges confronted by gifted African American students, as a function of their gender, were also explored.

Given the close relationship between academics and career development (Brown & Trusty, 2005), the investigation of gifted African American students’ experiences in the schools would not be complete without a discussion of their career aspirations. Because career aspirations are an important part of the career development process, there is a significant relationship between the career aspirations of youth and their future occupations (Adams & Singh, 1998; Artiles & Trent, 1994; Drummond & Senterfitt, 1999; Johnson, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Mahoney & Merritt, 1993; Tangri & Jenkins, 1986; Trusty, 2002; Turner & Lapan, 2003). In order for educators (i.e., school counselors) to better aid students, information regarding students’ career plans is necessary (Mau, 1995). Therefore, this chapter includes a discussion of the career aspirations of gifted as well as non-gifted African American students. More specifically, the following questions were answered in this section of the chapter: (a) What are the major influences on the career aspirations of African American students?, (b) How do the career aspirations of African American students compare to those of their White, non-Hispanic peers? (c) What are the unique features of the career
aspirations of gifted African American youth and (d) How do the career aspirations of gifted African American youth compare to other students? First, however, given the current popularity of the discrepant academic achievement between Black and White students, the literature review begins with an overview of the achievement gap.

2.2 Achievement Gap

The Increasing Role of the Federal Government

The achievement gap has been broadly defined, by the U.S. Department of Education (2001), as “the difference in the academic performance between different ethnic groups.” However, the research literature has focused primarily on the achievement disparity between African American and White students (Ferguson, 1998; Ford & Moore, 2004). This focus—which dates back to the Brown v. Board of Education decision in 1954—legislated desegregation of the American school system (Hallinan, 2001). Previous to the Brown v. Board of Education decision, the role of the federal government in education was somewhat unclear. Following the ruling, however, the federal government began to assume a more direct role.

In 1964, ten years after the mandate calling for legal desegregation, the federal government became concerned about the persistence of racial inequality in the U.S., and began investigating whether the lack of achievement among African Americans students due to differences in the quality of education between African American and White students (Hallinan, 2001). During this time, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 spawned a seminal study known as The Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966). It was based on nationally representative data—the 1965 Equality of Educational Opportunity
Survey of the U.S—gathered from K-12 students. The findings of the study substantiated the achievement gap between African American and White students. Nationally, it was found that schools accounted for only a small portion of the achievement gap, whereas family background was found to be a stronger predictor of academic achievement. Since then, other reports and empirical studies have been produced in an attempt to further detail the achievement of U.S. public school students and identify the reasons why some students succeed and others continue to fail (Ferguson, 1998; Jencks & Phillips, 1998). Rothstein (2004) noted that “scholarly efforts over four decades have consistently confirmed Coleman’s core finding: no analyst has been able to attribute less than two-thirds of the variation in achievement among schools to the family characteristics of their students” (p. 14). Such research continues to emphasize the importance of family characteristics in identifying the root of the achievement gap and to being closing the gap.

Despite the findings, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 marked the federal government’s commitment to equal educational opportunities for all children by providing funding to struggling school systems. Programs aimed at aiding poor and ethnic minority students were created, with the most notable of these programs being Title I, which provided up to 80% of all ESEA funding (Mitchell, 2000). For the first time in history, the government provided billions of dollars in funding to schools throughout the U.S. Although these efforts were quite notable, they still did not compensate for factors in contexts outside of schools (e.g., poverty), which research confirmed also impacted academic achievement.
In 1983, *A nation at risk*, produced by The National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), contained a scathing review of the American educational system. According to this document, the U.S. was at risk of being supplanted as a world super power because of the poor performance of its schools and the lack of achievement of its students. More specifically, the report criticized the American educational system for (a) its inadequate curriculum, (b) the lack of time students spend in school, (c) low expectations of students, and (d) low accountability of teachers. Although some argued that the report’s findings were unfounded (Bracey, 2003), it nevertheless had a tremendous impact in that it “moved education to the forefront of the national agenda” (Mitchell, 2000, p. 18).

On January 8, 2002, the role of the federal government in K-12 public education grew exponentially when President George Bush signed into law the NCLB Act. This bipartisan legislation was aimed at closing the achievement gap between students who were traditionally at risk for failure and those who were not. Stated differently, NCLB mandated that schools meet minimum standards of academic achievement, as measured by standardized tests, with underperforming schools being eligible for additional resources and those who continue to underperform facing certain sanctions, such as school choice and corrective actions. The passage of NCLB marked the most direct influence on U.S. public education of the federal government to date.

2.2.1 Current State of the Achievement Gap

Standardized tests are the most frequently used tool to determine whether students are meeting the standards set forth by policymakers (Brown & Trusty, 2005).
Most states develop and administer their own tests. However, since 2003, all states and their school districts receiving Title I funds have been required to participate in biennial National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading and math tests for students in Grades 3 through 8. It is through this testing that NAEP created a report, often referred to as “The Nation’s Report Card” (NCES, 2005), that provided data detailing the average academic performance of students in individual schools.

Following this national testing, consequences were given to students, teachers, administrators, schools, and school districts who did not demonstrate significant progress. For example, in some states, students who did not reach proficiency were not promoted to the next grade. Teachers and administrators could be replaced in low-performing schools, and states could close low-performing schools (Amrein & Berliner, 2002).

Since 1971 to the present, NAEP has measured long-term trends of student achievement by testing 9-, 13-, and 17-year-old students in reading and math, using questions and formats that have been relatively fixed. The purpose of this data was to determine students’ level of academic achievement over long periods of time. According to Grissmer et al. (1998), this “is the best available source of data about the changes in the White gap” (p. 182). From 1971 to 1996, the achievement gap narrowed considerably (Grissmer et al.), yet African American students still lagged significantly behind White students in academic achievement. For example, in 1996, 17-year-old African American students had an average reading proficiency score equal to that of 13-year-old White students. Similar results were found in mathematics, science, and
writing (NCES). According to NAEP data drawn from students’ performance during the 2002-2003 school year, it was found that African American students had taken strides toward narrowing the achievement gap, particularly at the elementary school level. Nevertheless, a significant gap between African American and White students still existed at each age level and subject. For example, the achievement gap for 9 year old in reading narrowed from 44 points on a 500-point scale to 26 points from 1971 to 2004. However, the reading skills of African American 17 year olds were still found to be similar to those of White 13 year olds (NCES, 2005).

Although performance on standardized tests is the most common means by which schools evaluate the achievement of their students, the research literature cites many other educational achievement gaps. For example, African American students are widely underrepresented in gifted programs, yet overrepresented in special education programs (Ford, 1996). In 2003, it was reported that only 22% of African American students took gateway courses (i.e., advanced math) by the end of eighth grade, compared to 33% of White students (NCES, 2005). Algebra has been identified as a “gateway” course because students who take it by the end of eighth grade are more likely to take rigorous coursework in high school, leading, quite often, to a college degree. Furthermore, in 2003, 5% of African American junior and senior high school students took AP exams compared to 12% of White students; 56% of all African American college freshmen graduated from high school on time with a regular diploma in 2002 compared to 78% of all White students in the same year. Also in 2002, 38% of African American students who were enrolled at 4-year colleges graduated within 6
years of enrollment compared to 57% of White students during the same time period (NCES).

2.3 Reasons for the Achievement Gap

Theories abound as to why the achievement gap between African American and White students persists, despite significant societal and educational changes, such as *Brown v. Board of Education*, which mandated equal access of African Americans to formal educational opportunities over half a century ago. This portion of the chapter explored biological, socioeconomic, social and cultural, and psychological factors found in the literature used to explain the Black-White achievement gap.

2.3.1 Biological Factors

*Race.* With publication of *The bell curve* (1994), Herrnstein and Murray reintroduced the theory of biological determinism, which was originally popular in the early 20th century. Biological determinism contends that Whites are intellectually superior to African Americans solely by virtue of their being White. Herrnstein and Murray’s conclusions were strongly disputed. Further, today, support for a biological explanation has waned. In regard to race, it has been found that there are more within-group genetic differences than between-group genetic differences (Fischer et al., 1996). These findings have discredited the argument for racial differences as a viable explanation for the Black-White achievement gap.

2.3.2 Socioeconomic Factors

*Poverty.* Many researchers and popular writers have argued that the most important factors accounting for educational inequality between African Americans and
Whites are socioeconomic (Gamoran, 2001; Hallinan, 2001; Kozol, 1991). In fact, some researchers have determined that socioeconomic variables account for as much as one-third of the achievement gap (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). According to Berliner and Biddle (1995), “truly impoverished students have a much harder time with education than students from wealthy, middle class, or working class homes” (p. 220). For example, students living in impoverished neighborhoods and communities are more susceptible to (a) poor access to proper vision, hearing, oral, and medical care; (b) increased exposure to lead; (c) more exposure to alcohol and smoking; (d) low birth weights; (e) higher rates of housing and student mobility; (f) high crime rates; and (g) malnourishment (Berliner & Biddle; Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, & Aber, 1997; Kozol, 1991; Rothstein, 2004). It is important to note that the achievement gap still exists even among African American and White families with similar incomes (Ferguson, 1998). However, all of the aforementioned factors tend to have detrimental effects on students, both physically and mentally, often leading to poor academic performance.

The Funding Gap. By virtue of the close ties between community affluence and school funding, students living in impoverished areas tend to be more likely to attend schools that are under funded as compared to schools in more affluent communities. (Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Brooks-Gunn et al., 1997; Delpit, 1995; Kozol, 1991). For example, Kozol noted that during the 1986-1987 school year in the New York City area, the Manhasset school district spent $11,372 per student, while per-student spending in the New York City school district was $5,585. New York City schools were not providing enough funding to students who had been placed at risk for failure (CFE,
1999), and, in January of 2001, New York State’s school funding formula was declared unconstitutional by the New York Supreme Court. Moreover, in a study conducted by the Education Trust (Carey, 2003), it was found that 37 out of 48 states were providing less funding for school districts with the most ethnic minority students. The lack of funding had a negative impact on the fundamental requirements for education. For example, without adequate funding, schools are often unable to provide competitive salaries for qualified educators (i.e., teachers, school counselors, etc.), textbooks, and many other basics that have been reported missing in our nation’s neediest schools (Kozol, 1991; 2005).

2.3.3 Social and Cultural Factors

According to the Coleman Report (Coleman et al., 1966), the family backgrounds of African American and White students and their widely different social and economic conditions accounted for most of the difference in the achievement gap, whereas schools accounted for only a small portion of the differences in student performance. Social and cultural factors that have been reported to impact academic achievement include peer relationships, concrete and abstract attitudes, childrearing practices, and expectations (Ford, 1995; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Moore et al., 2005a; Moore, 2005b; 2006).

Immigration Status. Ogbu (1978) found immigration status to be a powerful variable in determining African American students’ level of academic achievement. According to Ogbu, students of color born in the U.S. are “caste-like” or “involuntary” minorities, who have a deep history of acculturation into society through slavery,
conquest, and colonization. On the other hand, immigrant or “voluntary” minorities are those who have moved to the U.S. voluntarily for economic, social, or political reasons. According to Ogbu, these immigrant minorities do not equate education with acculturation, and feel freer to adopt the behaviors of the dominant society; they view certain behaviors (e.g., high levels of academic achievement) of the dominant society as beneficial to their future success.

Abstract and Concrete Attitudes. As an extension of Ogbu’s work (1978), Mickelson (1990) investigated the concept of abstract and concrete attitudes. Abstract attitudes are grounded in the American achievement ideology, which holds that education is the cure for poverty and unemployment and the key to upward social mobility. This attitude is also closely affiliated with a belief in meritocracy. In contrast, concrete attitudes are class and race specific; they are derived from a person’s family and community experiences. This subordinate system is distinctly different from abstract attitudes in that belief in education is based on social and cultural factors, or material realities, that have been shaped by family and community experiences. According to Mickelson, concrete attitudes “offer insights into the ways in which class, race, and gender differences in the opportunity structure shape students’ efforts in school and are expressions of students’ lived culture” (p. 46). For example, a student whose family member has been treated poorly at work may exert less effort in school because the student does not perceive a connection between education and social mobility within her/his social context.
In her research, Mickelson (1990) found that many African American students possessed a high regard for education. Interestingly, this belief was held by students who were excelling academically as well as those who were doing poorly; thus, a positive attitude toward achievement was paradoxically found to be associated with poor grades.

Using a sample of 1,193 high school seniors, Mickelson (1990) found that educational outcomes were dependent upon the social context in which learning took place. Although many of the students were found to possess abstract attitudes, it was their concrete attitudes toward education—their perceptions of the utility of education grounded in their material reality or social and cultural contexts—that influenced their effort in school and subsequent level of academic achievement; thereby lending support for Ogbu’s (1978) earlier argument. According to Mickelson (1990):

Material reality, whether in the form of the fairly close match between the promise and the reality of opportunity through education that middle class whites experience or the substantial contradiction between the promise and the reality that working-class blacks experience, provides the social context for every child’s achievement behavior in school. In a reasonable and rational process, material realities are the foundation of concrete attitudes toward education (p. 60).

Childrearing Practices. West, Denton, and Germino-Hauskens (2000) maintained that “whether or not children succeed in school is in part related to events and experiences that occur prior to their entering kindergarten for the first time” (p. vi). Based on this assertion, the achievement gap would also exist before students entered kindergarten. Therefore, their results assume that childrearing practices have an effect on academic achievement and, thus, on the achievement gap. In the longitudinal study
consisting of a nationally representative sample of 22,000 students, West et al. (2000) found that parents of different social classes raised their children in different ways. For example, it was reported that among kindergartners whose mothers had at least a bachelor’s degree, 93% were read to at least three times per week compared to 75% of kindergartners whose parents had a high school diploma or less. In a follow-up study utilizing the same participants (Denton & West, 2002), it was found that students who were read to, at least three times per week, demonstrated significantly more academic achievement in the spring of kindergarten and first grade compared to students who were not read to at least three times per week in kindergarten. This research also suggested that variations in childrearing practices have a powerful impact on the achievement of students. To further illustrate the achievement gap that exists related to childrearing practices, Rothstein (2004) offered the following explanation:

> A five-year-old who enters school recognizing some words and who has turned pages of many stories will be easier to teach than one who has rarely held a book. The second child can be taught, but, with equally high expectations and effective teaching, the first will more likely pass a reading test than the second. So the achievement gap begins (p. 19).

**Teacher Expectations.** The impact of teachers’ expectations on students’ achievement has been given substantial attention in the literature (Ferguson, 1998; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moore, 2006; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Ferguson contended that teachers may have lowered expectations for African American students compared to White students, based on the teachers’ previous experiences with African American students, and that low expectations of students’ abilities has often led to student underachievement in the classroom (Moore, et al., 2003; Moore, et al., 2005a;
Researchers have also noted that some students, when faced with racism and discrimination, respond in different ways. According to Sanders (1997), rather than underachieve, a student with a “strong racial identity and a commitment to academic and professional success” (p. 92) are often not deterred by low teacher expectations. Instead, these students tend to draw inspiration from negativity and use it as a stimulus to continue striving toward their goal of achieving and maintaining high academic standing.

Familial Expectations. According to Ogbu (1978), African American students, by virtue of being victims of a long-lasting history of racial oppression, have failed to form a strong academic orientation. He argued that, when members of a social group encounter a job ceiling, they tend to pass the belief to their children that they will face the same practices and that they will not be allowed to secure desirable jobs, regardless of their effort in school. Ogbu maintained that African American students may believe that their academic achievement will not be rewarded at the same rate as European American students; thus, they put forth less effort, resulting in underachievement.

Ferguson (1998) also found that African American parents tended to have lower academic expectations for their children as compared to White parents. For example, he reported that African American parents punished their children for getting grades of C- or less, whereas White parents punished their children for grades of B- or less.

2.3.4 Psychological Factors

Standardized Testing and Stereotype Threat. Standardized tests are used in schools throughout the U.S. school system to measure the achievement of all students.
However, there have been doubts concerning the validity of standardized tests as measures of intelligence. Jencks (1998) argued that standardized tests have failed to measure intelligence; instead, they measure previously developed abilities that, in part, develop in response to stimuli in the environment (e.g., parents, books, and friends). Similarly, Hunter and Bartee asserted that “it is imperative that standardized testing should not be treated as the ultimate measuring stick of educational attainment” (2003, p. 153).

African American students, in particular, have been found to perform poorly on standardized tests, thus limiting “their level of educational attainment, which in effect influences their economic standing” (Hunter & Bartee, 2003, p. 155). One explanation for African American students’ relatively low test performance has been the notion of stereotype threat (Moore et al., 2003; Steele & Aronson, 1995), defined as “the threat of being viewed through the lens of a negative stereotype, or the fear of doing something that would inadvertently confirm that stereotype” (Steele, 2003, p. 111). For example, African American students may experience a stereotype threat when they become aware of a stereotype that suggests their academic inferiority to White students. Steele and Aronson conducted a research study measuring the performance of African American and White college students on achievement tests. They found that the threat of negative racial stereotypes seriously lowered the test performance of African American students, causing them to under perform in relation to White students. However, removing the threat improved African American students’ performance dramatically.
Racial Identity Development. According to Grantham and Ford (2003), “racial identity development concerns the extent to which people of color are aware of, understand, and value their racial background and heritage” (p. 20). Racial identity development functioning assumes added significance for African American students who confront a barrage of racism and oppression as an inevitable aspect of their schooling (Kozol, 2005; Moore et al., 2005a; 2005b; 2006; Tatum, 1997). It has been argued in the literature that little progress will ever be made in terms of improving the academic achievement and social-emotion well-being of gifted Black students until educators focus specifically on their racial identity development (Grantham & Ford, 2003).

William E. Cross, Jr. introduced the most researched theory of racial identity development in 1971. Most recently, it has been updated into a model consisting of eight identity types clustered into three major stages consisting of eight identity types: (a) pre-encounter; (b) immersion-emmersion; and (c) internalization. The individual stages and identity types are as follows:

1. Pre-encounter
   a. Assimilation: Primarily concerned with their identity as an American and as an individual. Low salience is given to racial group identity resulting in little involvement in the Black community or issues related to Black people.
   b. Miseducation: Has internalized racial, stereotypes, negative images and inaccurate Black history. Sees very little to be proud of concerning the
Black community and is therefore very much uninvolved. Tends to “other” blacks. Tends to hate themselves for being Black.

2. Immersion-Emmersion
   b. Intense Black Involvement: Obsessed with Blackness. Tends to romanticize the history of Blacks. Engages and is interested in issues of the Black community but is also judgmental of other Blacks’ level of Blackness.

3. Internalization-Commitment
   b. Biculturalist: Equal importance and pride is given to being Black, as well as being an American. Able to successfully navigate both identities.

Numerous social scientists and educational researchers report that the degree to which gifted African American students value being African American can have a
significant impact on their academic achievement (Colangelo & Exum, 1979; Exum & Colangelo, 1981; Ford, Harris, & Scheurger, 1993; Ford-Harris, Scheurger, & Harris, 1991). For example, in a compelling study involving 28 urban African American eighth graders, Sanders (1997) determined that students who possessed higher levels of racial identity development functioning (e.g., internalization-commitment) reacted to racist encounters by overachieving. In other words, high achieving students were often characterized as having strong racial identities which enabled them to recognize the existence of racism and discrimination, yet, not allow these oppressive forces to impede their academic success; they strove to work hard and prove that they could excel academically despite such negativity. Similarly, Ford and Harris (1997) conducted a study that investigated the racial identity development functioning and achievement of 152 African American high school students. The participants were identified as general education students, gifted students, and potentially gifted students. Their findings determined that students identified as gifted students also had the highest level of racial identity development functioning, which corroborated Sanders’ findings.

2.4 Closing the Achievement Gap: What Has Worked

Between 1971 and 1996, the achievement gap between African American students and White students was narrowed by an astonishing 0.2 to 0.6 standard deviations (Grissmer et al., 1998). However, an explanation for these vast improvements was not widely reported in the literature (Jencks & Phillips, 1998). As an exception, Grissmer et al. (1998) offered the Civil Rights-War on Poverty model and the School-based model as potential explanations for the gains in African American
achievement during this 25-year period. According to the Civil Rights–War on poverty model, the gains were due to the impact of the civil rights movement and the effect of anti-poverty programs (e.g., Title I programs) enacted in the late 1960s and the early 1970s. According to the School-based model, the gains during that period were due to the direct effects of school desegregation, changes in African American students’ course enrollment, and class size reductions (Grissmer et al.).

More recently, the Heritage Foundation (2005) and The Education Trust (2003) identified schools throughout the U.S. that were successful in helping at-risk students achieve at the same level as middle-class students. In addition, these foundations proclaimed that other educational institutions could duplicate these schools’ successes. However, under closer inspection, many of their proclamations were found to be flawed.

The Heritage Foundation’s mission “is to formulate and promote conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense” (2005). The foundation sponsors a well-known program that claims success in narrowing the achievement gap in 21 high schools serving students who have been classified as impoverished. However, the following areas of concern have been raised: (a) entrance into the program’s schools was contingent upon parents’ applications, (b) only 6 of the 21 schools were non-selective, and (c) the program determined low income by parents’ incomes and students’ qualifying for lunch aid (Rothstein, 2004). Because some of these schools were very selective, it is possible that high-achieving, low-income
students were granted access to the schools, which would have increased the likelihood of the schools’ attaining high overall achievement levels. Additionally, determining disadvantaged students solely by qualifying for lunch aid, as determined by their family’s income, does not necessarily mean that other schools can replicate the same level of success. For example, “children from families at the upper end of this lunch-subsidy eligibility are more likely to have stable homes and regularly employed parents” (Rothstein, p. 73). Therefore, this program would not serve as a model for truly disadvantaged students who suffer from severe degrees of poverty.

Similar to the Heritage Foundation, the Education Trust (2003) identified a number of disadvantaged schools in which students performed well and achieved high standards. Several flaws found, in their claims, that (a) the high scores achieved by the schools were only in one subject area (math or reading), (b) some schools used student selection practices (i.e., some schools were classified as magnet schools and some had gifted programs), and (c) schools could qualify as disadvantaged but high-achieving when up to half of their enrollment was composed of middle-class families.

The research literature is replete with theories that claim to identify the causes and consequences of the achievement gap, as well as the processes that perpetuate the gap. Many reports of measures taken by schools that have “worked” to narrow the achievement gap, however, are either unfounded or do not adequately explain the phenomenon (Rothstein, 2004). Nevertheless, schools “are major social institutions that affect the lives of nearly all Americans, and, as such, bear responsibility for reducing
racial inequalities in educational opportunities” (Hallinan, 2001, p. 66)—in particular, the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programming.

2.5 Gifted African American Students

The underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education programs has persisted despite the 50th anniversary of the landmark Brown v. Board of Education (1954) legislation. According to Kozol (2005), desegregation was a short-lived victory, and schools have once again returned to an apartheid educational system. Recognizing the lack of cultural diversity among students identified as gifted, Congress passed the Jacob J. Javits Gifted and Talented Education Act of 1998. It supported the notion that all students, irrespective of race, ethnicity, or culture, have the potential to excel academically. It also provided funding to increase the identification and retention of culturally diverse students in gifted programs. Unfortunately, it has been reported that African American students underachieve in gifted and enrichment programs. The consequence of which may involve their removal from gifted education programs (Moore et al., 2005a), further exacerbating the problem of African American underrepresentation in gifted education programs.

As mentioned earlier, a growing body of evidence has been found that identifies certain socioeconomic, social, cultural, and psychological factors that influence the academic achievement of African American students as a whole, including gifted African American students. In addition to these factors, there are yet others that highlight the trend of gifted African American students being denied access to, dropping out of, or choosing not to participate in gifted programs. (a) locus of control;
(b) deficit ideology; (c) standardized testing; (d) peer influences; (e) racial identity development; and (f) gender are some of the identified causes found in the gifted research literature.

**Peer Influences.** Several educational scholars have explored the effects of peer influence on the academic achievement of African American students and have determined that negative peer pressure has a detrimental impact on students who opt for academic success (Fordham, 1988; Fordham & Moore et al., 2005a; 2005b; Ogbu, 1986). According to Lindstrom and Van Sant (1986), gifted African American students encounter peer rejection quite often. As an example, Ford (1998) provided a case study offering the perceptions of Danisha, a gifted African American female who moved from a low-income community, in which the majority of her peers were African American, to a predominantly White and affluent neighborhood. The transition to her new residence contributed to heightened levels of psychological distress. Danisha experienced considerable pressure to both maintain her grades and demonstrate loyalty to her African American peers who were not identified as gifted. This tension between academic success and conformity to peer expectations created a considerable amount of pressure for Danisha as she worked to achieve academically and maintain her gifted status.

**Locus of Control.** The relationship between African American students and educators has received considerable attention in the research literature. For example, Flowers, Milner, and Moore (2003) investigated the effects of locus of control on African American high school seniors’ aspirations. They concluded that, after
controlling for social class, students' perceptions of parent's expectations, gender, cognitive ability, and school characteristics, locus of control yielded a statistically significant positive effect on educational aspirations. More specifically, their findings demonstrated that African American high school seniors who believed that they controlled their own lives (versus African American students who believed that chance played a greater role) reported higher educational aspirations; thus, an internal locus of control had a significant impact upon educational aspirations.

Deficit Ideology. Ford et al. (2002) posited that a disturbing number of educators evaluate African American youngsters using deficit perspectives. Such perspectives focus on students’ shortcomings to the exclusion of their strengths. Ferguson’s (1998) research corroborated this perception and concluded that many teachers believe that African American students lack the intellectual capacity to function successfully in gifted programs. These attitudes have resulted in fewer referrals of African American students for gifted services. It is incumbent upon school personnel to develop the requisite cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills in order to work effectively with gifted African American adolescents (Day-Vines, et al., 2005; Patton & Day-Vines, 2005).

Standardized Testing. Ford et al. (2002) asserted that educators react to students who are different from them. These differences can have a powerful impact on the development of definitions, policies, and practices that ultimately penalize gifted African American youngsters. For example, teachers, parents, and other school personnel (i.e., school counselors, administrators, etc.) rely heavily on standardized tests
to identify students for gifted programs even though these tests have often been criticized as inappropriate for use with students from culturally diverse groups. Indeed, standardized testing, used to decide who gains entry to gifted education programs, has been reported to contribute to the disproportionate representation of African Americans in gifted education programming—the reason being the culturally biased nature of these tests (Ford, et al; Ford & Moore, 2004; Moore et al., 2005a; Steele & Aronson, 1995).

**Stereotype Threat.** African American students, with strong ties to their racial identity development, are capable of underachievement in gifted education programs (Ford & Moore, 2004; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Moore et al., 2005a). According to the theory of stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995), African American students’ poor performance on standardized tests may be attributed to feelings of anxiety that result from self-induced pressure to perform well. That is, African American students with a strong sense of their racial identity development may feel overly anxious when completing assessment measures as a function of their desire to dispel the myths that African American students can not perform well on intelligence tests (Ford & Moore, 2004). Consequently, performance anxiety may contribute heavily to low test scores, resulting in African American students being denied access to gifted education programs.

**Racial Identity Development.** Racial identity development functioning assumes added significance for African American students who confront a barrage of racism and oppression as an inevitable aspect of their schooling (Kozol, 2005; Tatum, 1997). Particularly, racial identity development functioning can have a significant impact on
the academic achievement of gifted African American students (Colangelo & Exum, 1979; Exum & Colangelo, 1981; Ford, Harris, & Scheurger, 1991; Ford-Harris, Scheurger, & Harris, 1993). Many scholars have asserted that in response to racism in educational environments, African American students at earlier stages of racial identity development often use coping styles (e.g., oppositional identity) that interfere with their academic achievement (Ford & Harris, 1997; Ford et al., 1993; Fordham, 1988; Grantham & Ford, 2003; Ogbu, 1988). For example, Ford (1992) conducted a quantitative study consisting of 148 gifted and non-gifted African American male and female students in urban school districts. The results of the study indicated that the academic program (gifted vs. nongifted) rather than gender played a more important role in the formation of an oppositional identity, as evidenced by not believing in the American achievement ideology. Indeed, both the nongifted male and female students tended to believe that school was a waste of time, particularly for African Americans, and they also had low grade-point averages.

Although higher levels of racial identity development functioning have been associated with above-average academic achievement in African American students, peer isolation is still a prevalent issue for these students. When African American students are underrepresented and unidentified as gifted, the small numbers who are selected may eventually become one of a few participants. This may result in these students developing feelings of overwhelming isolation, resulting in underachievement, which may lead them to drop out or be banished from gifted education programming (Moore et al., 2005a; 2005b; 2006)
**Color-blind Racism.** Contemporary racial inequalities are the function of “‘new racism’ practices that are subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial” (Bonilla-Silva, p. 3). Indeed, according to Bonilla-Silva (2003), “a new powerful ideology has emerged to defend the contemporary racial order: the ideology of color-blind racism” (p. 25). To further assert the power and impact of color-blind racism, the author offers the following explanation:

Much as Jim Crow racism served as the glue for defending a brutal and overt system of racial oppression in the pre-Civil Rights era, color-blind racism serves today as the ideological armor for a covert and institutionalized system in the post-Civil Rights era. And the beauty of this new ideology is that it aids in the maintenance of white privilege without fanfare, without naming those who it subjects and those who it rewards....Shielded by color blindness, whites can express resentment toward minorities; criticize their morality, values, and work ethic, and even claim to be the victim of ‘reverse racism’...Although it engages, as all ideologies do, “blaming the victim,” it does so in a very indirect, “now you see it, now you don’t” style that matches the character of the new racism...that justify racial inequality” (pp. 3-4, 25).

Clearly, color-blind racism is quite inconspicuous in that it is, in essence, “racism without racists” (Bonilla-Silva, p. 29). For instance, black students’ underrepresentation in highly valued educational environments (e.g., gifted education programming) could very easily be explained as “the product of market dynamics, naturally occurring phenomena, and blacks’ imputed cultural limitations” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 2). This explanation is an example of a common color-blind racist frame that is used by those in power to justify blatant discrepancies in opportunities and performances between Blacks and Whites.

According to Bonilla-Silva (2003), the central component of any dominant racial ideology is called its frame, or its set way of interpreting information. The frames
of dominant racial ideologies operate to hide the fact that dominance of ethnic minorities is taking place. Color-blind racism has four central frames: (a) abstract liberalism, (b) naturalization, (c) cultural racism, and (d) minimization of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003). Abstract liberalism, the most common frame of color-blind racism, consists of framing race-related issues in liberal language. For example, using the liberal principle of meritocracy and viewing each person as an individual, color-blind racists are able to justify the opposition to affirmative action policies on the grounds that such policies show preferential treatment towards people of color. This claim, however, requires one to ignore the fact that people of color are strikingly underrepresented in highly valued jobs and educational institutions, for example, and is an effective abstract utilization of the notion of equal opportunity. Naturalization is the suggestion that racial phenomena are natural occurrences. For instance, a color-blind racist may explain their preference for white friends and partners as “the way things naturally occur in life” or due to the fact that “people are naturally attracted to people who look like themselves.” Cultural racism frames are dependent upon culturally based arguments to explain the standing of minorities in society. This frame was far more common during periods of slavery and Jim Crow. As an example, a color-blind racist may explain a Black students’ low performance on a standardized test as a testament to the student’s inability to learn as opposed to a culturally biased test. Minimization of racism entails the admittance of racism, while downplaying its impact on minorities. With this frame, color-blind racists can accept indisputable acts of overt discrimination because such acts are “far less common than they were in the past.” This frame,
however, totally ignores the more common modern-day acts of subtle institutional racism that is far more prevalent in today’s society.

*Gender.* Badolato (1998) detailed developmental aspects of gifted females by noting that girls in elementary school exhibited a more positive attitude toward academic achievement than gifted males and/or nongifted females in their peer groups. As gifted females transition into middle/junior high school, they continue to excel academically (Catsambis, 1994). Regrettably, by the time they reach adolescence, societal norms dictating the need to please family and friends influence how gifted females perceive their academic achievement. As the acquisition of friendships, peer acceptance, and male-female relationships assume more importance in the lives of gifted adolescent females, the added pressure to be passive leads many females to deflect attention from their intellectual abilities (Akos, 2002; Akos & Galassi, 2004; Noble, 1994).

The research of Sadker and Sadker (1994) concluded that teachers’ behaviors reinforce a certain feminine socialization that requires females to remain passive and avoid the perception that they are being obnoxious, “too loud,” or “un-ladylike.” Teachers call on boys more frequently than they do girls, permit boys to dominate classroom discussions, and reward boys more than girls for their class participation, effectively silencing female students. In addition to classroom dynamics that diminish the academic performance of females, family and societal expectations take precedence over girls’ personal need to achieve at high levels once they reach adolescence (Witherspoon, 2005). Many gifted girls, who once proudly exhibited academic
excellence in elementary school, gradually abandon lofty goals in order to avoid isolation and exclusion.

Ford (1998) provided a case study offering the perceptions of Danisha, an African American female who moved from a low-income community, in which the majority of her peers were African American, to a predominantly White and affluent neighborhood. The transition to her new residence contributed to heightened levels of psychological distress. Danisha experienced considerable pressure to both maintain her grades and demonstrate loyalty to her African American peers who were not identified as gifted. This tension between academic success and conformity to peer expectations created a certain amount of ambivalence for Danisha as she worked to maintain her gifted status: Danisha’s sense of isolation and frustration may point to a lack of gifted African American role models in schools.

African American males in gifted programs are a rarity (Grantham, 2004a; 2004b). In fact, they are more underrepresented in gifted programs than females (Ford, 1996). Indeed, the scholarly literature pertaining to African American male educational experiences is replete with information documenting the environmental and cultural disadvantages of African American males (Bailey, 2003; Davis; Moore et al., 2005a; 2005b). An important aspect that has been discussed, although sparingly (Davis, 2003), is the notion of Black male masculinity and its impact on academic achievement. For some African American males, education is seen as feminine or irrelevant to their masculine identity (Noguera, 2003). As such, negative influences from peers may have a particularly detrimental effect on gifted African American males who, by virtue of
participating in gifted programs, may feel pressured to underachieve in order to
conform to more common conceptions of masculinity within their schools and in
society as a whole.

2.6 Career Aspirations of African American Students

For almost a century, many theories have been formulated to explain the process
of career development. However, little attention has been paid to aspects of cultural
diversity in career development. More recently, however, researchers have come to
understand the importance of the role of ethnic and cultural diversity in career
development. Subsequently, educators have developed a more profound understanding
of the African American career development process (Brown, 2000; Herr, 1999).

The career decision-making process for African American students may be far
more challenging than that of many Whites students (Fouad, 1995). According to
Kenny et al. (2003), “urban high school youth, particularly minority youth, face
increasingly severe obstacles in pursuing their educational goals and career aspirations”
(p. 142). In order to effectively help these students with career development, the
obstacles they encounter must be explored (Constantine, 1998).

2.6.1 Socioeconomic Status

Due to African Americans disproportionate lower socioeconomic families in
comparison to their White counterparts, “socioeconomic status (SES) is an important
variable moderating the effects of ethnicity on career behavior” (Leung, 1995, p. 552).
In poorer neighborhoods, positive individual role models are scarce (Carter & Cook,
1992; Graham & Taylor, 2002; Grantham, 2004a; 2004b; Ogbu, 1978), and African American students living in these areas have less opportunity to gather information on potential careers, thus limiting their career aspirations.

2.6.2 Racism

As has been previously mentioned, racism has the potential to have an extremely detrimental affect on the academic achievement of African American students. Similarly, racism may also play a significant role in the career aspirations of African American students. Because of racism or discriminatory practices, African American students may become disinterested in education, thus limiting their career aspirations. For example, they often do not see a connection between educational achievement and occupational attainment, because of the perception of a glass ceiling (Ogbu, 1978). According to Ogbu, a glass ceiling is the occupational level above which African Americans have historically been unable to rise. Even if the glass ceiling does not exist, the mere perception may have a debilitating effect on students’ ability to pursue certain careers or enroll in certain courses in which they believe they cannot excel (Fine, 1997: Post-Kammer & Smith, 1986).

2.6.3 Academic Performance

In another study of African American adolescents, Trusty (2002) investigated educational expectations using a national longitudinal sample. The findings of Trusty’s study substantiated the long-held opinion of educators that academic performance has an effect on career development and that “expectations and implied attainment are
Based on students’ skills and efforts” (p. 342). Likewise, Ford (1992) posited that high achieving African American students who perform well in school believe in upward mobility, the efficacy of school, and hard work and effort as keys to success in life.

2.6.4 Parental Involvement

In 1999, Smith-Maddox conducted a study using cross-sectional data from 3,009 African American eighth graders who participated in the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988. She investigated the educational and career aspirations of these students, using social and cultural capital as a framework (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Her findings revealed that African American students, on average, had high educational aspirations. For example, 39.4% of the respondents aspired to graduate from college and almost 25% aspired to attend graduate school. Only 1.4% of the students were tentative about finishing high school. Given the high educational aspirations and the positive effect of academic performance on career aspirations, specifically postsecondary attainment (Trusty, 2002), it is not unreasonable to assume that the students in the study also had high career aspirations. Parental involvement and participation in activities outside of the home were found to be the strongest predictors of educational aspirations. This finding seems reasonable when considering the fact that parents quite often play an integral role in their children’s extracurricular activities.

However, it should be noted that parental involvement was measured by school-related activities, such as attendance at school meetings and classroom visits. According to Lareau (1987), many African American families are, indeed, involved in their children’s education. However, they chose to exercise their involvement at home as
opposed to the school. Therefore, the parental involvement findings may not be a truly accurate depiction of the level of parental involvement in this study. Nevertheless, parental involvement has shown to have a strong influence on African American students’ career development in numerous other studies (Lareau, 1987; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Morrison & McLoyd, 2000).

According to Bandura (1977), the careers to which adolescents aspire are contingent upon their level of self-efficacy with respect to that career. For example, in a study conducted by Alliman-Brissett, Turner, and Skovholt (2004), the mechanisms underlying parental involvement were examined with regard to their impact on African American students’ pursuit of their career goals. African American girls’ self-efficacy levels were more responsive to their parents’ emotional support while boys’ levels were more responsive to the parents’ modeling behavior. Given the relationship between parental involvement, career self-efficacy, and career aspirations, these results seem to suggest that increasing parental involvement will increase the career aspirations of African American adolescents. However, research is only now beginning to focus more attention on the importance of family in the lives of minority youth (Kenny et al., 2003).

2.7 African American and White Students’ Career Aspirations

Given the barriers facing many African American youth, it is quite easy to assume that African American students would aspire to careers that require less challenging coursework and less pay in comparison to White peers who may not face similar obstacles. However, social scientists have reported that African American students’ career aspirations do not differ from those of White students (Arbona, 1996;
Mickelson, 1990). For example, Bobo, Hildreth, and Durodoye (1998) explored the career aspirations of 1,611 African American, White, and Hispanic sixth graders. These scholars discovered that, among the African American and White students in the study, both groups’ top two career choices were being an “athlete” or “police officer.” An interesting finding of the study was that, although both groups’ top two choices were the same, the White students chose a broader range of careers overall. The authors posited that, since White students possibly belong to a higher socioeconomic status, they are potentially exposed to people with more diverse careers. This exposure could influence the options that students feel they have at their disposal. However, this claim was not substantiated by the study’s data.

It is also noted that, in the research literature, career goals have been operationalized most often by career aspirations and career expectations. According to Trusty (2002), aspirations are considered to be abstract ideas, while expectations are more concrete. African American and White students tend to have similar career aspirations, but African American students tend to have lower career expectations than White students (Arbona, 1996). Given the immense barriers they perceive must be overcome to make their goals materialize, African American students often believe that their aspirations will not come to fruition (Arbona).

Mickelson (1990) described the difference between concrete and abstract attitudes. Abstract attitudes are based upon a belief in American achievement ideology, or a belief that education is the key to social mobility. Concrete attitudes are developed from a person’s experiences within their family and community: “Thus, they offer
insights into the ways in which class, race, and gender differences in the opportunity structure shape students’ efforts in school and are expressions of students’ lived culture” (Mickelson, p. 46). Given the relationship between academic achievement and careers (Brown & Trusty, 2005), it is imperative that concrete attitudes are explored in order to understand how race influences career aspirations.

2.8 Career Aspirations of Gifted African American Students

Given the dearth of research literature pertaining to gifted African American students, it seems likely that the topic of gifted African American students’ career aspirations would be even more uncommon. In a review of the broader context of gifted education literature as a whole, Greene (2002) discovered that the primary topics of exploration were multipotentiality, the career needs of females, perfectionism, and early cognitive and vocational maturity. The general topic of gifted African American students’ career development was conspicuously absent from this list.

Nevertheless, there are some social scientists who report that gifted ethnic minority students face multiple obstacles related to their career development (Colangelo & Davis, 2003; Lindstrom & Van Sant, 1986). African American gifted students, particularly, are faced with “multiple options and multiple external pressures” (Lindstrom & Van Sant, p. 584). For example, it has been documented that student-teacher relationships are extremely important to African American students (Ferguson, 1998; Ford & Moore, 2004). Unfortunately, it has also been noted that teachers often have lower expectations of African American students than of White students (Ferguson, 1998; Moore et al., 2005a; 2005b), even if the students have been identified
as gifted (Ford, 1996). African American students in classes with teachers who do not have high expectations for those students may suffer academically, resulting in underachievement and lower career aspirations (Flowers et al., 2003; Ford, 1996). Issues such as those pertaining to teacher expectations are vital to the academic and career success of gifted African American youth.

2.9 Summary

This review of the research literature addressed salient topics designed to provide sufficient information to contextualize the current study. These topics included a description of the achievement gap, the current state of the achievement gap, explanations for the achievement gap, and programs reported to be successful in closing the achievement gap. A description of gifted African American students included the gender issues that accompany African American students identified as gifted. The career aspirations of gifted and non-gifted students were also explored.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The recruitment and retention of gifted ethnic minority students continues to pose a problem for many U.S. public school systems. Considering the positive impact that rigorous coursework has been found to have on students’ future academic performance (Trusty, 2002), the trend of gifted African American students being denied access to, dropping out of, or choosing not to participate in gifted programs represents an extreme loss of talent. Moreover, gifted African Americans, by virtue of being both gifted and African American, may experience gifted programs differently from gifted European American students (Ford, 1996), which may result in differential social and academic outcomes (Grantham & Ford, 1998; Ford & Harris, 1992).

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is an independent agency recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation to accredit master's degree programs in numerous counseling specialties, including school counseling. In the most recent revision of CACREP standards for accreditation, the topic of gifted education training was introduced. However, there was only subtle mention of giftedness. In addition to the conspicuous absence of giftedness training in CACREP standards for pre-service school counselors, there is a striking lack of attention paid to gifted African Americans students in the education research
literature as a whole. In the process of reviewing the school counseling research literature, the researcher discovered a shortage of studies specifically documenting gifted African American students’ attitudes, perceptions, and experiences with school counselors. This gap in the literature means that there is little, if any, information regarding the meaning, context, and process by which gifted African American students have formed their perceptions of gifted education and of school counselors in particular. As such, the question must be asked: “How will educators, such as school counselors know the degree to which these students are satisfied with, and therefore willing to utilize school counseling services?” If school counselors are to be leaders and change agents in the lives of all students, as the ASCA National Model supports (ASCA, 2003), it is necessary for school counselors, school counseling directors/supervisors, and counselor educators to gain considerable knowledge of gifted African American students, which has been lacking in the field of school counseling (Colangelo, 2002; Ford, 1995). For this reason, the researcher chose to utilize qualitative methodology to conduct the current study, as it has been noted to be most useful in the collection of detailed and in-depth understanding of the meanings people attribute to their lives and experiences (Glesne, 1997; Patton, 2002). Furthermore, qualitative methodology has been found to be particularly effective “for examining how people explain, justify, rationalize, and articulate racial viewpoints” (Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 11), which is a focus of the current study.

Overall, this study explored gifted African American students’ attitudes, perceptions, and experiences in gifted education programs. By focusing on topics that
were important to these students and that affected their lives, the study’s findings may be able to assist educators—teachers, school counselors, and administrators—in better understanding the complexity of these students’ unique lives (Phelan, Davidson & Yu, 1998) as they experience gifted education programming. As a contribution to the school counseling discourse, this study offers a body of knowledge regarding the role of educators, such as school counselors in the lives of gifted African American students, and how they might help these students be successful in gifted education programming.

3.2 Research Questions

The overarching purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of gifted African American students’ experiences in gifted educational programming and their perceptions of educators, such as school counselors. This study also explored how these students perceived themselves specifically in terms of their race, gender, and giftedness. The research questions were as follows:

1. How do African American students perceive being gifted?
   a. How do these perceptions differ on the basis of gender?

2. How do gifted African American students perceive educators, such as school counselors?
   a. How do these perceptions differ on the basis of gender?

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding of gifted African American students by giving them the opportunity to tell their stories. Further, the intent
was to explore how these students make sense of their school environments—in the case of gifted education and school counseling. According to the interpretivist approach to qualitative research, researchers must study the environment through those who have constructed said meaning (Cusick, 1973). The interpretivist viewpoint understands these meanings to be consequential for the ways in which humans live their lives, ultimately governing the way they perceives themselves in relation to their environment and resulting in a set of beliefs and actions (Cusick). Therefore, interpretivism was a major aspect of the theoretical framework for this study.

According to Schwandt (2000), the process of interpretation or understanding entails “getting inside the head of an actor to understand what he or she is up to in terms of motives, beliefs, desires, thoughts, and so on (p. 192). Although the possibility of achieving an interpretive understanding of another’s world has been greatly debated (Geertz, 1979), gaining the “emic” or “insider” view has been described as a powerful central concept for understanding the purpose of qualitative research.

Do any of us presume to understand, work in, and make decisions about high schools have any basic understanding or feeling for what students see or think about when they look at their school and their relationship to that school? Despite the vast body of literature on high school students, the answer to the question is probably ‘No.’ …If we are to have any understanding of what individuals make of their lives, then we have to make a genuine attempt to see and understand their world as they see and understand it….If we fail to see it as they see it, we will not understand what they do, nor ultimately, what we do (Cusick, 1973, pp. 2, 4).

Although the research literature is silent with regard to the perceptions of gifted African Americans and their attitude toward educators (i.e., school counselors), taken as a whole, African Americans are often the subject of educational research studies. Much
has been reported on the topic of African Americans and their overall dismal performance in our nation’s schools compared to their European American peers, and there is an abundance of research literature documenting the importance of race and gender in the educational experiences of African American students. However, quite frequently, the voices of these students go unheard and are not reported within the discourse.

Because qualitative studies are invariably interpretive in nature, the researcher’s interpretive lens is largely shaped by Critical Race Theory (CRT). Therefore, CRT was utilized as a theoretical underpinning for this study. Essentially, CRT contends that race and the meanings attached to race are socially constructed and cannot be ignored as a powerful aspect of human social life. Using CRT as a framework allowed students to voice their concerns, particularly those related to race and race relations, due to the theory’s focus on race and race relations. Such information has been found to contribute significantly to the educational research literature (Fernandez, 2002; Parker & Lynn, 2002).

CRT is very closely related to critical theory. Its roots are deeply entrenched in the desire for reinterpretation of the world, and it aims for empowerment and confrontation of injustice (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Moreover, the crux of critical theory lies in its concern with issues of power, control, and world politics, coupled with the notion that while people’s lives are shaped by the circumstances they inherit. Based on this theory, people also have the ability and agency to shape their own world (Klincheloe & McLaren, 2000).
CRT is similar to critical theory because of its focus on a critique of society; however, it differs by virtue of its paradigmatic focus on racialized discourses and ethnic epistemologies (Ladson-Billings, 2000). In the mid-1970s, CRT was first introduced to the field of law by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, who were concerned about the slow rate of racial reform in the U.S. (Delgado, 1995). Years later, it became prevalent in the field of education and has since been endorsed by social scientists as “a tool by which to define, expose, and address educational problems” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 7), while also granting an “understanding of how race and racism affect education and lives of the racially disenfranchised” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 8).

CRT was chosen as the theoretical framework for this study for the following reasons:

1. Although the salience of racism in society continues (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), discussions pertaining to race and the effects of racism in America are relatively rare within the academy (Omi & Winant, 1994). Given the underrepresentation of African American students in gifted education (Ford, 1998; Grantham, 2004a), this study’s findings have the potential to stimulate discussion among colleagues and students in the gifted education community, as it concerns the daily realities of African American gifted students.

2. African Americans have unique social, cultural, and political histories, different from their European American counterparts, which shape their epistemologies or the ways in which they view the world and produce/acquire knowledge (Ladson-Billings). However, many of the current and more popular paradigms are based
on the social, cultural, and political experiences of European Americans (Stanfield, 1994). Using CRT as a theoretical framework for this study was deemed as a useful tool for examining social justice issues related to “African American students” and “gifted education” because of the theory’s recognition and embracing of the distinctive identities of African Americans.

3. CRT uses storytelling or personal narratives to “analyze the myths, presuppositions, and received wisdoms that make up the common culture about race and that invariably render blacks and other minorities one-down” (Delgado, 1995, p. xiv). More than a decade ago, storytelling or personal narratives began to grow in popularity in the social sciences (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Therefore, using CRT as a theoretical framework for this study enabled the author to give voice to the participants, in addition to potentially piquing the interest of scholars who recognize students of color as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Bernal, 2002) and who value their unique perceptions and experiences.

4. CRT is currently expanding to include key intersections of other areas of difference, such as feminism (Lynn & Parker, 2002). Many gifted African American females face difficulties in pursuit of their educational goals because of issues related to gender as well as to race (Ford, 1998; Henfield & Witherspoon, 2006). As such, CRT was useful in exploring issues related to gender and race in a predominately white setting (i.e., gifted education programs). Additionally, the research literature is replete with documentation of
the enormous difficulties of African American males in American educational systems (Grantham, 2004b; hooks, 2004; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Madison-Coleman & Moore, 2002; Moore et al., 2005b; Moore, 2006). As such, the experience of both African American females and males was thoroughly explored.

Although CRT appears to be a valuable tool, there have been criticisms in the research literature pertaining to its usefulness in conducting educational research. For example, Wong (1998) discussed the dangers to researchers, suggesting that becoming too close to those being researched can lead to problems related to who the research is for, the true purpose of the research, and why the research is being conducted. Wong also cautioned researchers not to expect too much from the stories of participants and also not to expect established norms and practices from respondents. Similarly, Hermes (1998) pointed to the importance of considering community standards when conducting valid social justice research in his study of legal history with Native American reservations and European Americans. CRT was determined to be an inadequate tool for determining what the tribe wanted for education in their communities in Hermes’ research.

Although critiques of the usefulness of CRT in conducting educational research exist in the literature, it is also posited that CRT was a useful framework for conducting this study. It is the researcher’s belief that the world consists of multiple, subjective truths constructed on the basis of issues of power. The researcher makes explicit his concern for oppressed groups, particularly for African Americans, with a deeply rooted
desire to expose, advocate, and confront injustices concerning them. These values undoubtedly shaped this study, as the researcher was openly interested in these students’ responses and reactions to educational isolation as one of the few gifted African Americans in their respective schools.

A belief in human agency is a fundamental epistemological assumption of the researcher. People have the ability to shape their own world; although their lives are shaped by the circumstances they inherit (i.e., race), they have the ability to act. Given that theoretical perspectives ought to be an extension of epistemological assumptions (Crotty, 1998), the researcher was justified in the utilization of CRT as a theoretical framework in conducting the proposed study.

3.3.2 Population

The Connie Belin and Jacqueline Blank International Center for Gifted Education and Talent Development (BBC) of The University of Iowa in Iowa City, Iowa supplied the mailing list for the study. The BBC is an internationally known leader in the field of gifted education. Its areas of focus are: (a) identifying gifted learners; (b) providing specialized opportunities for students; (c) conducting comprehensive research on giftedness; (d) supporting professional development for educators; (e) disseminating information through conferences and publications; (f) assessing and counseling gifted students and their families; (g) enhancing educational opportunities through technology; (h) leading in local, national, and international policy formation; (i) promoting equity and access in developing talent; (j) consulting with schools and professionals; (k) advocating for children and families; and (l) evaluating gifted programs. Participants for
this study were chosen from a list of past and present participants in the Belin-Blank Exceptional Student Talent Search (BESTS).

The goal of a talent search is to discover, through above-level testing, those students who need further educational challenge to fully realize their academic talent. Above-level testing is an educational procedure in which a test developed for older students is administered to younger students. Students who do well on grade-level tests have correctly answered most of the questions. Grade-level testing tells us what they know, but it does not tell us what they are ready to learn. The results of an above-level test can identify what students are ready to learn. BESTS is a talent search endorsed by BBC, the Office of Precollegiate Programs for Talented and Gifted at Iowa State University, and the University of Northern Iowa. The primary goals of the program are (a) to discover, through testing, students who need further educational challenge to fully realize their talent; (b) to provide students, parents, and educators with an objective measure of a student's readiness for specific academic enrichment and/or accelerative programming; (c) to provide a challenging and fun experience for students; and (d) to provide students, parents, and educators with information on BBC programs, research, and other informative articles through the BBC newsletter. More specifically, the vision of BESTS is to be a portal to the enrichment programs at the three Iowa regent universities.

Students in Grades 4 through 9 who score at the 95th percentile or above on the Core Total or Language Total, Maps and Diagrams, Math Computation, Math Concepts, Math Problem Solving, Math Total, Reading, or Science subtests on a grade-
level standardized test, such as the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS), are recommended to participate in BESTS. If students did not take the ITBS but took another standardized achievement test, such as the Florida Comprehensive Achievement Test or Stanford Achievement Tests, the same requirements apply. If students do not take standardized tests annually, scores from the most recent testing are used.

3.3.3 Participant Selection

Students were given permission by their parent or legal guardian to participate in the study. These participants were in remote locations throughout the Midwestern and southeastern parts of the U.S. Consequently, in-person meetings were not logistically possible. For this reason, the researcher was unable to interact with students and their families in face-to-face meetings as a means to gain their trust and permission to work with them. However, because of the lack of ethnic minority representation in the state of Iowa, it was not difficult to gain the trust of participants and families. For example, at the conclusion of the study, several parents mentioned that, because the researcher was the only African American employee of BBC and the only African American male in the College of Education at The University of Iowa, they were more inclined to allow their child to participate in the study; they wanted to assist a fellow African American.

It is important to select participants, based upon willingness, experience, and the extent to which they can provide meaningful and useful information (Patton, 2002). As such, the sample was purposefully selected (Patton, 2002) as opposed to randomly selected. This is a common sampling method in quantitative research:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which
one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling (p. 230).

The participants were, however, limited to African American students who qualified for BESTS programming. The researcher chose to focus on traditional, middle-school aged (10-14) African American students because: (a) this was the time period of diverse and rapid development (Pruitt, 2000); (b) ethnicity and racial identity development has been found to be linked to the achievement and competence of middle school students (Holcomb-McCoy, 2005); (c) according to Akos, “middle school students are often, for the first time, making independent and autonomous choices that may significantly shape developmental paths” (2005, p. 97); and (d), although inconsistent, the research literature suggests that race and gender has an influence on middle school students’ transition outcomes from middle to high school (Akos & Galassi, 2004). All of the participants attended 6-8 grade middle schools. The researcher decided to focus upon the experiences of eighth grade aged (14) African American students as they may have had more opportunities to interact with middle school counselors in comparison with students in earlier grades. Of the total BESTS population, 104 students were identified as eighth-grade gifted African American students. The participants in the study, were selected from this population.

After gaining IRB approval to conduct this study (see Appendix E), each family in the population pool was mailed an envelope containing one demographic questionnaire to be filled out by the participant, one letter introducing the researcher and explaining the purpose of the study, one informed consent form requiring signatures by one parent and the student to be interviewed, and a pre-stamped envelope for the return
of the items (i.e., demographic questionnaire and informed consent form) to the researcher.

The size of the sample in qualitative research is often subjective. Creswell (1998) suggests that the number of participants in qualitative research should range anywhere from five to twenty-five. However, according to Jones (2002), “questions about appropriate sample size have less to do with actual numbers of participants or cases and much more with the quality and depth of information elicited through the research process” (p. 465). The first 12 families who agreed to allow their children to participate were contacted by telephone to arrange a time to conduct the online interview, as well as provide instructions on how to establish an AOL Instant Messenger™ account (Moore & Flowers, 2003). The participants are detailed in the table below (for a more comprehensive description, see Appendix A):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chosen Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>School Size</th>
<th>Free/Red. Lunch</th>
<th>Community Makeup</th>
<th>Community Type</th>
<th>Family Makeup</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>930</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>M/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>83-100</td>
<td>298</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>Mostly White</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>M/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>83-100</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>M/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>87-92</td>
<td>1372</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>83-100</td>
<td>660</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>Mostly White</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>M/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cortland</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>83-100</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M/F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>87-92</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanice</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>87-92</td>
<td>1558</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shariff</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>83-100</td>
<td>645</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keshia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87-92</td>
<td>1983</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>M/F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Description of Participants’ Gender, Age, Grade, Grade Point Average, School Size, School Free/Reduced Lunch Percentage, Community Makeup, Community Type, Family Makeup
3.3.4 Data Collection

Each method of data collection has its individual strengths; no one method can be trusted to give a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in question (Patton, 2002). Therefore, qualitative research requires multiple methods for gathering data (Glesne, 1997; Spradley, 1979). The following methods of data collection were utilized for this study: (a) individual interviews and (b) document collection.

*Individual Interviews.* According to Glesne, “[t]he opportunity to learn about what you cannot see and to explore alternative explanations of what you do see is the special strength of interviewing in qualitative inquiry” (1997, p. 69). In order to truly capitalize on this strength, the researcher made use of a combination of specific interviewing approaches: (a) informal conversational interview and (b) general interview guide.

Initially, the study was designed for interviews to be conducted at BBC. However, because participants were located in numerous cities across the Midwestern and Southeastern U.S., it was more convenient for both researcher and participants to conduct interviews online. Participation in this study entailed an interview that lasted approximately 1.5 to 2 hours, using AOL Instant Messenger™, which is “a free windows-based program (available from www.aol.com) that anyone with Internet access can download and use to transfer messages instantly with other users (e.g., interviewer to interviewee and interviewee to interviewer)” (Moore & Flowers, 2003). This method enabled the researcher to interview all participants, individually from their homes, thus removing the need to meet face-to-face and increasing the likelihood of
their participation. Furthermore, according to Flowers and Moore (2003), using AOL Instant Messenger™ to conduct on-line interviews allows the researcher “to explore students’ perceptions of their satisfaction with existing programs and/or services,” which was the purpose of this study. Also, because the interviews were typewritten, the data need only be saved to the hard drive, thus removing the need for transcriptions—another benefit of collecting interview data via AOL Instant Messenger™.

Informal Conversational Interview. Also referred to as an “unstructured” interview, the informal conversation approach to individual interviewing is the most open-ended of all the individual interview approaches and offers maximum flexibility (Patton, 2002). The questions are not predetermined but often arise in the immediate context during the natural course of activity. The researcher used this method in the initial stages of the current study to assist in the formulation of general interview guide questions. For example, as the Counseling and Diversity Administrator for the BBC, the researcher had numerous opportunities to ask BBC employees with experience working with gifted African American students in public schools questions pertaining to their knowledge of these students’ experiences with school counselors and with gifted education in general. These data, along with the information gleaned from the initial literature review, in addition to the personal experiences of the researcher, were the sources used to formulate the questions for the general interview guide.

General Interview Guide. The general interview guide approach to individual interviewing was the primary means of data collection in this study, as it is useful to ensure that each participant in the research study receives the same general line of
questioning (Patton, 2002). However, this method was more structured than an “unstructured” interview; hence, it is often referred to as a “semi-structured” interview. Open-ended questions were formulated to create the general interview guide using the researcher’s personal experiences, a review of the literature, and informal conversational interviews, before online interviews actually took place. However, with this method, questions may be added or subtracted depending on the responses of the participants before, after, or during the interview; thus, allowing the researcher to take into account the emergent, constantly changing nature of qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Indeed, a major strength of this approach is that “the guide helps make interviewing a number of different people more systematic and comprehensive by delimiting in advance the issues to be explored” (Patton, p. 343), while simultaneously offering the flexibility to divert from the interview guide and ask follow-up questions related to specific participant responses. By doing so, the researcher may uncover phenomena taking place in the lives of participants that has yet to be discussed in the literature—thus representing a significant contribution.

**Document Collection.** The strongest assertions are supported by the most data sources (Glesne, 1997). Therefore, collecting documents in conjunction with other methods of data collection (i.e., interviews) is essential to thorough, trustworthy qualitative research (Patton, 2002). According to Glesne, collecting documents enhances interviews by providing a historical contextual dimension, in addition to “enrich[ing] what you see and hear by supporting, expanding, and challenging your portrayals and perceptions. Your understanding of the phenomenon in question grows.
as you make use of the documents and artifacts that are a part of people’s lives” (1997, p. 59). Examples of documents the researcher collected were the following: (a) school demographic data, (b) student demographic data, (c) community demographic and (d) family demographic date (see Appendix A). These documents were sent to families’ homes, filled out by those who agreed to participate in the study, and mailed to the researcher in addition to signed informed consent forms. Once the researcher received all of the aforementioned documents, pseudonyms were assigned to each of the participants to protect their identities and maintain confidentiality.

3.3.5 Data Analysis

Although many scholars contend that major gains in the equalization of educational opportunities and outcomes must be tied to structural changes in the larger society (Anyon, 1997; Apple, 1996), this study explored the ways in which these issues can be addressed within the walls of our nation’s schools. Social scientists have described students of color as “holders and creators of knowledge” (Bernal, 2002). Indeed, the research literature is replete with information documenting the educational plight of African Americans. However, quite often, the voices of these students go unheard. As such, the researcher chose to use qualitative methods. More specifically, grounded theory techniques—namely constant comparative analysis—was used to analyze the data obtained in this study. Thorne (2000) explains constant comparative data analysis as follows:

Many qualitative analytic strategies rely on a general approach called "constant comparative analysis". Originally developed for use in the grounded theory
methodology of Glaser and Strauss, which itself evolved out of the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism, this strategy involves taking one piece of data (one interview, one statement, one theme) and comparing it with all others that may be similar or different in order to develop conceptualisations of the possible relations between various pieces of data. For example, by comparing the accounts of 2 different people who had a similar experience, a researcher might pose analytical questions like: why is this different from that? and how are these 2 related? In many qualitative studies whose purpose it is to generate knowledge about common patterns and themes within human experience, this process continues with the comparison of each new interview or account until all have been compared with each other.

Once participants mailed the researcher their informed consent and demographic forms, interviews were conducted online. After the first interview was saved, the data analysis phase of the study began and continued as each interview was collected, with each new interview being compared to its predecessor. Qualitative research analysis begins with the identification of the themes emerging from the raw data, which develops into an indexing system, a process otherwise known as "open coding" (Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). During open coding, the researcher identifies and tentatively names the conceptual categories into which the observed phenomena will be grouped. The goal is to create descriptive, multi-dimensional categories that form a preliminary framework for analysis. Words, phrases, or events that appear to be similar are grouped into similar categories, otherwise known as open codes. These open codes
may be gradually modified or replaced during the subsequent stages of analysis that follow.

The purpose of coding is not only to describe but also, more importantly, to acquire new understanding of a phenomenon of interest. The next stage of coding analysis is axial coding (Strauss & Corbin (1998), which involves re-examination of the previously identified open codes to determine how they are linked. In other words, axial coding is the process of taking broad open codes and comparing and combining them in new, more streamlined ways as the researcher begins to assemble the final explanation of the phenomenon in question. During axial coding, the researcher is responsible for building a conceptual model and for determining whether sufficient data exists to support that interpretation. This is not a linear process, however. During axial coding, the researcher may determine that the initial categories identified must be revised, leading to re-examination of the raw data. Additional data collection may occur, at any point, if the researcher uncovers gaps in the data. Ideally, the research report will be a rich, tightly woven account that "closely approximates the reality it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57).

To summarize the data analysis process of the study, after receiving all of the informed consent and demographic forms, participants were contacted and interviews were conducted online. The researcher did not wait until all interviews were collected; online interview data analysis began as soon as the first interview was collected. Open coding was the initial step, where interview data was broken down into more manageable categories according to information gleaned from informal interviews with
colleagues and reviews of the literature. This process of open coding of the interviews continued until all of the interviews were collected. At that point, the researcher began the process of axial coding with the members of the research team. By combining open codes into similar categories, or axial coding, themes began to emerge from the data. Once themes emerged, the researcher utilized the member checking process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to confirm the findings. None of the participants had anything to add or change because they believed the researcher accurately captured their experiences.

Research Team. On another note, research analysis is quite a daunting task. Therefore, a research team consisting of members familiar with gifted education and qualitative methodologies was recruited to assist once the topic of the study was finalized. An African American female counselor educator who conducted a qualitative dissertation study was a member of the team. Additionally, a European American administrator at BBC whose dissertation study was also qualitative served as a member of the team, as well (see Appendix C).

3.4 Researcher Subjectivity

According to Peshkin (1988), researcher subjectivity has the “capacity to filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the outset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement” (p. 17). In other words, the life experiences of the researcher had the potential to influence the way in which the research data was interpreted. For example, before confirming the exact focus of this study, the researcher spent three summers as an academic counselor for The Center for Talented Youth (CTY)—world renowned gifted education program—at their
flagship John Hopkins University; at which time, the researcher had the privilege of observing over 600 gifted students each summer. During this period, under the auspices of Dr. Donna Y. Ford—internationally known authority on multicultural gifted education—the author collected an abundance of data detailing past perceptions of multiple experiences with and observations of ethnic minority students in the gifted program. This experience provided invaluable information regarding the lives of these students. However, this experience, in conjunction with an extensive review of the literature, combined to shape the researcher’s assumptions entering the study, which were as follows:

1. African Americans, in gifted education programs, experience these programs differently from other students.
2. African American females may have a more difficult experience in gifted education, compared to their male peers.
3. Gifted African American students have a strong, positive racial identity.
4. Gifted African American students have low perceptions of educators, such as school counselors.

In addition to the researcher’s experience at Johns Hopkins University, he was also (a) the only African American male in the counselor education program at The Ohio State University; (b) the only African American male member of faculty in The University of Iowa’s College of Education; and (c) the only African American administrator at BBC. As such, the researcher has learned how not only to exist but also to thrive in environments where the potential for discomfort and racism exists as a
function of being the sole black presence. Indeed, by adopting what Dubois describes as a “double consciousness” (1903), the researcher has learned to, almost unknowingly, adjust his disposition, according to the specific surroundings and respond in a manner deemed as “acceptable” to those in positions of power. Moreover, according to Ladson-Billings (2000), “scholars of color who have experienced racism and ethnic discrimination (yet survived the rigors of the degree credentialing process) have a perspective advantage (p. 271). These sentiments are supported by Delgado, who asserted that “many members of minority groups speak two languages, grow up in two cultures….And so …who has the advantage in mastering and applying critical social thought? Who tends to think of everything in two or more ways at the same time?” (p. 8).

Although the researcher’s aforementioned life experiences (in addition to the experiences with gifted students at Johns Hopkins University that were mentioned in Chapter One) allowed for certain advantages in conducting this study, these experiences also led to certain subjective biases (i.e., a belief in a dissimilar experience from others as a result of being an African American male) that were accounted for in the writing of the research findings. Therefore, specific tactics were employed to produce a more trustworthy study and to prevent any misrepresentation of participants.

3.5 Trustworthiness

As the interpreter of collected data, the researcher is in the one position of power. However, during the course of conducting this study, many methods were implemented to lessen the probability of unethical behavior and to ensure a more
trustworthy study. In qualitative research, trustworthiness depends on the extent to which researchers take steps to increase levels of credibility, transferability, dependability, and authenticity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.5.1 Credibility. Credibility is the extent to which the researcher is able to accurately capture the views of those being researched (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking were utilized to ensure the credibility of the findings. Understanding that through triangulation, the strongest assertions can be made (Glesne, 1997), multiple techniques were implemented to increase the credibility of the research findings; specifically, data, investigator, and methodological triangulation was employed.

1. Data triangulation was implemented by the following sources (see Appendix A for additional demographic information):
   a. Students who had experience with educators, such as school counselors
   b. Students who did not have experience with educators, such as school counselors.
   c. Students who went to school in the Midwestern US.
   d. Students who attended school in the Southeastern US.
   e. Students of varying academic achievement levels.

2. To ensure investigator triangulation, the following techniques were implemented:
   a. A research team comprised of individuals experienced in qualitative research methods was formed (See Appendix A).
b. Peer debriefing involves enlisting the support of skilled colleagues to discuss evolving suppositions and findings of the study. This allows the researcher to clarify thoughts, probe any researcher biases, and challenge presumptions or interpretations throughout the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Members of the research team served as peer debriefers for the study.

c. Similar to peer debriefing, member checking was done to ensure accurate interpretations of the data and to unmask any inferences made as a result of personal subjectivity (Glesne, 1997). It consisted of asking the participants of the study for clarification of their interview responses before saving the interviews to the computer hard drive. Additionally, once the research team developed the major findings and themes of the study, this was also verified by the study’s participants.

3. The methodological triangulation techniques utilized in the study were (See Appendix A for more information):

   a. Individual interview data
   
   b. Student demographic questionnaires
   
   c. School data
   
   d. Family data
   
   e. Community data

3.5.2 Transferability. Transferability refers to the measures taken by the researcher to increase the ability of the findings to be generalized to other similar cases
Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a technique of transferability, the researcher and participants gave “thick description” of the events conveyed during interviews. The researcher asked numerous questions concerning the meanings students attach to their environment. In other words, interview questions regarding circumstances, intentions, strategies, motivations, etc. were answered by students to shed light on the sense students’ make of their lives. Additionally, a reflexive journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was kept to record the beliefs, attitudes, and opinions which provided a record of researcher introspection and understanding.

3.5.3 Dependability. In order for a qualitative study to be deemed dependable, a logical, traceable, documented audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) must be established. For this study, the following techniques were utilized in the creation of said audit trail:

1. Raw data (i.e., interview records, demographic questionnaire results, school data)
2. Data reduction and analysis (i.e., summaries and working hypotheses)
3. Data reconstruction and synthesis (i.e., themes, definitions, relationships, interpretations, inferences, connections to existing literature and integration of concepts, relationships and interpretations)
4. Process notes (i.e., methodological notes including procedures, strategies, decisions and rationale, documentation regarding trustworthiness including peer debriefing, member checking, etc.)
5. Intentions and disposition (i.e., proposal, personal notes and reflections, expectations and predictions)

6. Instrument development (i.e., protocols and demographic questionnaires).

7. A reflexive journal was also instrumental in increasing the dependability of the study.

3.5.4 Confirmability. In order to meet the trustworthiness standard of confirmability, the researcher presented the data in an objective manner that was clear and discernable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To this end, the aforementioned techniques of triangulation, member checking, and reflexive journaling were utilized.

3.6 Authenticity

In essence, authenticity is the attempt to synchronize the goals of the researcher with the needs of the people being researched (Spradley, 1979). In order to balance participant needs with the needs of the researcher (i.e., completion of dissertation), openness and honesty were tantamount. Participants were informed through informed consent documents that a major reason for our interaction was the completion of the dissertation. However, the researcher was also honest in telling participants and their families of the researcher’s deeply-rooted desire to improve the condition of African American students, and that the researcher would not be conducting such an arduous task, such as a qualitative study, without a true devotion to the cause. The students and their families were also made aware of the integral role they were playing in the conducting of the research study, as their involvement in the process was necessary to ensure accurate interpretation of their stories.
3.7 Interpretation and Representation

Qualitative research provides a window of understanding into the lives of people. It is essentially used to increase multicultural understanding. However, the extent to which data are accurately interpreted is a fundamental tension in critical theory-informed qualitative research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). If precautions are not taken to enhance accurate interpretation and representation of people’s stories, those being studied can easily be exploited in the name of scientific inquiry (Spradley, 1979).

To avoid “othering” participants, collaborative relationships were formed with the participants of the study. Additionally, because a good qualitative researcher first and foremost tries to understand participants’ rationale for doing the things they do (Ladson-Billings, 2000), numerous member checks were conducted with participants from the time of first contact until the end of the study (Glesne, 1997). The researcher’s goal was to assume the role of a learner and to view the study through the eyes of a child whose function is to seek knowledge and grow (Zaharlick, 1992).

According to Richardson (1994), writing itself is a form of inquiry that can help aid understanding. In addition, researchers must locate themselves in the writing, yet remain cognizant of the need to stress the voice of others. To account for this, the researcher took the following precautions during the final writing of the data:

1. The participants were allowed to talk and explain their own reality through lengthy quotes and vignettes.
2. Writing was done in the language of the participants.
3. An autobiographical style was used.
All of the precautions served as a means to bridge the gap between academia and those outside academia, in addition to providing evidence that the documented knowledge was mutually produced and a product of collaborative efforts between the researcher and the participants.

3.8 Summary

This chapter detailed the topic of the research study and presented several research questions. It also described the research design, which included specific information regarding the theoretical framework, population, participant selection, data collection, data analysis, interpretation, representation, and trustworthiness. In the next chapter, findings of the study are presented.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a synthesis of the findings derived from the analysis of interviews and documents collected in addition to a brief description of the participants. As has been stated, the purpose of this study was the exploration of gifted African American students’ experiences in gifted education and their perceptions of educators, such as school counselors. More specifically, the purpose of the study was to increase understanding of the experiences of gifted African American students. Of particular interest, however, were the meanings gifted African American students’ attribute to their experience in gifted education programming, the process by which they have come to develop these meanings, and the context under which these meanings and processes were developed. To this end, the following research questions were asked:

1. How do African American students experience being gifted?
   a. How do these perceptions differ on the basis of gender?

2. How do gifted African American students perceive educators, such as school counselors?
   b. How do these perceptions differ on the basis of gender?

4.2 Demographic Characteristics

The following table offers a brief description of the gender, age, GPA, and grade distribution of the participants:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.1: Frequencies and percentages by gender, age, and grade

All of the participants attended a grade 6-8 middle school model except for one, as shown in Table 4.1. This student (Samantha) skipped eighth grade and was attending a high school in the 9th grade at the time of the study. Another student reported to BBC that she was in eighth grade (Keisha), but was found actually be in the seventh grade upon examination of her demographic questionnaire.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Point Average (GPA)</th>
<th>Free/Red. Lunch</th>
<th>School Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>93 and above</td>
<td>92 and below</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2: Frequencies and percentages by grade point average, free/reduced lunch, and community type

Table 4.2 shows that a total of 11 students reported their grade point averages, with 45% having averages of 93 and above and 55% having averages of 92 and below. Even though many of the students attended schools with large numbers of students who qualified for free or reduced lunch services (See Appendix A), none of the participants
of the study reported that they received free/reduced lunch services. Table 4.2 shows that none of the participants of the study were eligible for such services. Of the 11 participants who reported the names of their respective schools, the majority of them (45%) attended schools with small student populations (200-850 students). The number of participants attending schools with medium (851-1500) and large (1501-2100) student populations was evenly dispersed (27%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level of Education Attained by Primary Parent or Guardian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avg. Student GPA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.3: Distribution of Frequencies and Percentages of Participants’ Primary Parent or Guardian’s Highest Level of Education Attained

Table 4.3 shows that of the ten participants who reported the highest level of education attained by their primary parent or guardian, the majority (40%) of them had at least one parent who completed a graduate or professional school degree. In addition, 30% of primary parents or guardians completed some college, 10% completed business or trade school, 10% completed a 2-year degree, and 10% completed a 4-year degree. Five of the students with parents who completed at least four years of college reported grade point averages ranging from 92-100. According to the table, the other five
students whose parents obtained at most, a 2-year degree, reported grade point averages ranging from 87-92. It should be noted that all of the students reported that at least one of their parents attended school beyond high school.

4.3 Theme Emergence

As mentioned in chapter three, analysis began with the assignment of open codes developed from a thorough review of the literature in addition to the raw interview and document data and followed with the development of axial codes. Once developed, all codes were systematically organized and kept in a codebook (Appendix D) that included descriptions of each code, as well as examples.

The primary researcher developed the initial open codes and e-mailed them, along with the interview transcripts and demographic questionnaires to the other members of the research team. Using this information, the research team members coded each line of the transcripts and recorded their findings in the coding worksheet (Appendix E). Once the team members finished coding their copies of the transcripts, research team meetings were held. At this time, each line of the transcripts was compared and contrasted until 100% agreement was reached regarding the assigned codes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At this point, all codes and transcripts were discussed until 100% consensus was reached regarding the emergence of themes and categories depicting the lives of the participants.
4.4 Presentation of Findings

In the spirit of trustworthy qualitative research (Patton, 1990), rich, in-depth descriptions (i.e., lengthy quotes) were used to fully capture the meanings of participants’ lived experiences and perceptions as communicated in their own words. It must be noted that the researcher took the liberty of correcting some of the misspellings for the sole purpose of increased clarity and understanding. However, sufficient care was taken to prevent the distortion of the true meaning of said quotes.

To ensure a comparative thematic analysis, the research team was guided by the procedures of grounded theory approaches (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researchers disaggregated the data and broke them down into manageable interpretive parts following sequential coding steps. Emerging themes were identified with 100% consensus from all members of the research team. At this point, the author sought confirmation of themes by consulting the participants of the study. Based upon these themes and the related sub-themes, the researcher also developed multiple assertions, further explaining the lives of the gifted African American students who participated in the study. The assertions were agreed upon by the researchers as well as the participants and are reported throughout this section. Again, each participant was assigned a pseudonym to preserve the identities of the participants.

According to Chenail (1995), openness is a very important aspect of qualitative research; particularly regarding the presentation of findings. Chenail indicated that researchers should be as open and honest as possible, when reporting their findings to allow readers to decide for themselves whether the findings are trustworthy:
A way to maintain this posture is to consider the other in the process at all
times and make it a priority that you present as much of the "back stage"
information of your research as possible. By back stage I mean that you
communicate as clearly as you can what it was that you did to create your
project, what were your choices along the way, what else did you consider
doing in the project but chose not to do. Get clear with yourself what it is
that you are doing at every point along the way of doing your project.
Note it and present it to your readers.

To allow for more openness, the findings of this study were presented with particular
attention paid to identification of thoughts and actions by the researcher that may have
impacted the study.

4.5 General Perceptions of Giftedness and Gifted Education

Although providing information about each student’s perceptions of school
counselor utility was, ultimately, the focal point of the study, in order to provide a better
understanding of these students’ perceptions, the meaning, context, and process by
which they came to these perceptions was first established.

The majority of the participants described their participation in gifted education
as a positive experience overall. For example, Brent [male, 93-100] reported that it is
“not bad at all to be in the gifted program,” which was representative of the perceptions
of this group of students. However, based on the research literature, the researcher knew
that gifted African American students were likely to have issues that were considered to
be difficult to overcome. For this reason, the researcher probed deeper and asked the
participants questions regarding their experiences in gifted education, leading to the
emergence of a plethora of benefits and negatives as a function of being identified as
gifted and/or of being placed in gifted education programs. Their perceptions were
categorized according to the following themes: (a) the challenge of gifted courses,
(b) highly skilled teachers, (c) equally skilled peers, (d) preparedness, (e) increased
options and opportunities, (f) standing out, (g) differential treatment, (h) and stigma.

4.5.1 “…you need classes that really challenge you…”: Academic Rigor as Motivation

Although there were significant demographic and contextual differences among
the individual participants, each identified the challenging curriculum offered by gifted
education programs as a key benefit. For example, Kelly [female] mentioned that
teachers “go at a fast rate that teaches me more,” while Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.]
explained it in the following way: “I believe you’re [gifted students] smart and you need
classes that really challenge you and teach you things that are on your level or higher.”
It was also noted by Samantha [female, 87-92] that the best thing about being in gifted
courses was “knowing that I make great grades and I’m taking higher than normal
classes.”

However, Shariff [male, 93-100 G.P.A.] reported an experience in his class
where “the other gifted students at first used to have a competition in class to see who is
the smartest. But soon we all became friends.” When asked how the competition ended,
he replied, “I don’t know, it just got old and people were tired of someone shoving their
test scores in their face to see who got the highest.” It was evident that both male and
female gifted African American students were competitive in nature, given that each of
them specified the challenge of gifted education as a major benefit of being identified as
gifted and participating in gifted education programs. They appeared to be intrinsically motivated and valued the difficulty associated with an advanced curriculum.

4.5.2 “...teachers motivate me and make me want to learn.”: Highly Skilled Teachers

Although the participants in this study appeared to be intrinsically motivated, they also seemed to benefit from external forces, such as qualities exhibited by their teachers. They reported that teachers offered overt encouragement, which also operated as a source of motivation. According to Carlos [male, 87-92 G.P.A.], “they give u encouraging words and tell u things u need to here to keep u going.”

Another response documenting the qualities of skilled gifted education teachers was offered by Samantha, who was accelerated into a magnet gifted education high school [female, 87-92 G.P.A.]: “the teachers don’t pressure you to turn in something or do your work. If you turn it in, you do, if you don’t, you don’t. They teach you to realize you must push yourself to succeed.” This appeared to echo the sentiments of a female student, who stated that his teachers “help me become more independent” [Kelly]. These comments suggested that participants’ teachers valued independent learning, thus further promoting the intrinsic motivation that these gifted African American students appeared to bring to their classes.

One participant also characterized their teachers as “less strict, more open-minded, and friendlier” [Cortland, male, 93-100 G.P.A.]. He went on to say: “The best thing about it is that the gifted program at our school has the best teachers....” Indeed, it appeared that these students had an internal locus of control and appreciated the freedom that was allowed in a gifted classroom. However, they also expressed
appreciation for teachers who offered encouragement as a means to maintain students’ motivation after they were accepted into the program.

However, in contrast, one female student revealed that her teachers did not seem to meet her standards:

Well I could use some real teachers, not these phony phys ed majors. I would like real (highly advanced) physics, more math classes (something to come after calculus, like vectoral analysis), and I really want to learn Latin. Some good English classes (covering Henry James, Jane Austen, Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Anthony Trollope) wouldn't be bad [Amanda, 93-100 G.P.A.].

Amanda attended a middle school in a rural area with the smallest enrollment (298 students) of any participant in the study (See Appendix A). Many of the resources afforded by schools in larger school districts may not have been readily available to this student. Therefore, although the student may have been upset by the formal training (or lack thereof) of her current teachers and the lack of resources, this may be an issue that is common among students in her school and is not limited to those in gifted education, given her school’s small size and rural location.

4.5.3 “You get to be with other children on the same skill level”: Equally Skilled Peers

Thus far, the participants in this study have been characterized as both intrinsically motivated yet appreciative of encouragement offered by their gifted education teachers, which demonstrates that they value external forces to some degree. Closely related to this value is their stated affinity for learning in an environment with equally skilled peers. In the words of Carlin [male, 93-100 G.P.A.], he states: “As I continue to learn with kids who are gifted and want to learn I can push myself to do well and I will be better off.” He further stated: “you get to be with other children on the
same skill level as you and we learn at the same pace. If I don’t understand something
the children can help me and vice versa.” This seemed to suggest that learning with
peers who are of equal skill level provided additional support that may not be available
outside of an inclusive gifted environment, further demonstrating the support African
American students found in a gifted education environment.

Participants identified a variety of factors as examples of how participating in
gifted education that would benefit them in the future in terms of preparedness and
increased options and opportunities.

4.5.4 “...a lot of work...can help me get ready for things ahead of me.”: Future
Preparedness

Some students perceived their participation in gifted education as a means to
better prepare themselves for future challenges. Keshia [female, 87-92 G.P.A.]
suggested that gifted courses would help her “pass my classes by giving me a lot of
work so that can help me get ready for things ahead of me.” Another student mentioned
that gifted courses prepared students to excel on standardized tests:

They help me by exposing me to types of literature that I, myself would
not have independently selected...such as classics & British literature. The
class has higher standards thus presenting me with ample preparation for
high school in the coming year....in the future because of the advanced
vocabulary in the books I am instructed to read, I will ideally, do better on
my SAT’s [Shanice, female, 87-92 G.P.A.].

4.5.5 “Being gifted gives me a chance...”: Increased Options and Opportunities in the
Future

Although an appreciation for the “preparedness” value of gifted programs was
evident, the participants clearly valued increased options and opportunities that a gifted
education afforded them, such as helping them to “get a good job and to have a great career” [Keshia, female, 87-92 G.P.A.] as well as to obtain scholarships: “Being gifted gives me a chance to get scholarships and other opportunities to do things” [Michelle, female, 93-100 G.P.A.]. In the words of a male participant, “Colleges will look at my academic records and see how great I have been in school….all these awards and interviews [will] impress them [and then] the college will accept me and that means I am getting a step closer to getting a good job” [Shariff, 93-100 G.P.A.]. A third participant stated: “it [gifted courses] look great on your transcript... [which would] also increase my chances of getting a scholarship” [Brian, male, 93-100].

Although participants, overall, seemed to believe that there were considerable benefits to participating in gifted programs, one student was not as convinced of those future benefits as evidenced by the following interview excerpt:

Henfield: …earlier you said you don't think you get anything from the gifted classes didn't you?
Angela: Nothing beneficial. But it does challenge me. That’s cool. But it's nothing I would call beneficial
Angela: My friend told me it’s not like its going to give me a scholarship
Henfield: Ok. I understand. You like to be challenged but you don't see how it will help you in the future. Am I right in saying that?
Angela: Exactly [Angela, female, 83-86 G.P.A.].

Angela seemed to downplay the value of gifted education throughout the interview. For instance, when asked about relationships with other students in gifted courses, she responded: “I can't make friends with them because I know deep down inside they don't want to talk to me. I’m too different. Yeah I’m smart but I’m real. I’m not snobby and they know that.” She went on to say: “Everyone knew I was smarter than the normal kids but I didn't want to be like that. So I tried to act up real badly and I
got a reputation for being a ‘bad person’ unlike them [gifted students]....” My interest was sparked by the notion of Angela resorting to misbehavior as a means to distance herself from her gifted identity:

Henfield: So you misbehaved so you wouldn't be known as gifted?
Angela: Exactly
Henfield: What made you stop acting that way?
Angela: Things came up... I didn’t desire the attention anymore. I realized that I was getting too much attention from the wrong people besides I was hurting a lot of people
Henfield: Are you proud to be known as gifted?
Angela: Nah. it don't do anything for me. It’s not benefiting me. My mother is very happy...but it doesn't change me
Henfield: Do you see any benefit to taking gifted courses
Angela: No
Henfield: Do you do well in them?
Angela: Yes my teachers think I’m very smart, but I really don’t think much of it. It just give me a "big head" but it don't benefit me

Given this student’s negative remarks concerning gifted education in general, it is not surprising that she expressed a negative perception of the benefits of gifted education.

During the course of the study, I became interested in how participants came to an understanding that participation in gifted education would offer some future benefits. For example, when I asked Brent [male, 93-100 G.P.A.] to identify who told him that gifted students would receive future scholarships, he replied: “I don’t know. I guess I just knew because I know they are looking for smart kids.”

As a whole, although participants in general were able to articulate what they perceived to be the future benefits of gifted education, they were somewhat unclear regarding how they came to this understanding, as evidenced by the awkward silence that ensued when I typed questions concerning the genesis of their understanding of
these benefits. Going into the study, I assumed that students learned of the benefits from educators—teachers or school counselors; but analysis of the data revealed otherwise. It is quite possible that educators are not vigilant about systematically reinforcing the reasons for students’ placement in gifted programs as well as the benefits of gifted education, may—even unintentionally—cause harm to these students, as suggested by the following interview excerpt:

Samantha: I’ve been in gifted since the 2nd grade and in elementary school I didn’t like being separated from all of my old friends from regular classes. They never told us the benefits. I found out this year

Henfield: How did you find out? Who exactly told you?

Samantha: Like I said, the school I attend now is basically a gifted school I guess you can say. It’s known for its smart students. At the beginning of the year we held assemblies for every grade level and they discussed our grades and our classes with us so we would know specifically what we were there for

Henfield: Oh ok. Every school should do that. It seems like it would make you a bit resentful to be separated from your friends and not know why...almost make you dislike being gifted?

Samantha: Exactly. That’s how I felt at first until I made friends in the gifted program. But there are some students in the gifted program who are different that other people in gifted may look at as weird. Those people sometimes never make friends in the gifted program and they really dislike it [Samantha, 9th grade, 87-92 G.P.A.].

According to Samantha, gifted African American students who are not told the benefits of and the reasons for being taken from “regular” classes and being placed in a gifted program may experience personal/social harm. Therefore, it is incumbent upon educators to provide these students with such information before placement in a gifted class occurs. Nevertheless, again, these students were able to articulate what they
perceived to be future benefits of gifted education; this understanding could have been a component of these students’ motivation.

4.5.6 “I am a rarity in my school...”: Standing Out

Participants repeatedly mentioned “standing out” as a benefit to being in gifted education programs. According to them, being an African American in a gifted program was an uncommon occurrence in their schools. As such, they felt that they tended to “stand out” in comparison to other African American students in their schools. For example, according to Shanice [female, 87-92 G.P.A.]:

I am a rarity in my school. There are only two African American students in my gifted class so when we succeed it becomes a larger deal than it would have been if we weren’t Black students…

Additionally, Shariff [male, 93-100 G.P.A.] remarked that “…it is great…people recognize me as being an intelligent person.” Similarly, Michelle [female, 93-100 G.P.A.] stated: “I think the best thing about it [standing out] is showing other African American students that they can excel too and do great things….” She seemed to embrace the leadership role that may accompany being one of the few gifted African Americans in a given educational environment. Some of the students even appeared to gravitate towards the notion of being perceived as a role model because of their gifted identity.

However, other students attached negative connotations to “standing out,” with some students stating that even though they presently value standing out, but in the future, it may present a problem. Shariff [male, 93-100 G.P.A.] predicted that “…people at the high school will always look at you to see if you slip up. They expect you to be
leaders to others.” Shanice [female, 87-92 G.P.A.] indicated that the worst part of being gifted is that “…because you are a gifted student you are looked upon as if you are a role model and because of this people wish to find perfection in you.” Kelly [female] summarized the sentiments of those who associated a negative connotation with standing out as follows: “…I stand out, but not in a good way that I want to. It has been hard because there is a very small amount of African Americans in my grade.”

4.5.7 “…if I was a white male my social problems would be solved.”: Differential Treatment

Teachers. African American students in gifted programs seem to experience considerable differential in the classroom, at the hands of gifted education teachers in comparison with other students. Amanda [female, 93-100 G.P.A.] offers a detailed description of her experience:

At my school it is a universally acknowledged fact that you can't be smart unless you are blonde, protestant, male, and have particular political opinions. I don't fit into any of these categories. So they think that I am a delinquent posing as a "teacher pleaser"... I get good grades and like some of my teachers (because they read) better than my fellow class mates. Being a "teacher pleaser" is a good thing. Some of my teachers don't let me be a teacher pleaser though because these teachers believe those stereo-types as much or more than the kids...They discourage me intellectually by assigning busy-work and group projects. The busy-work takes time away from my reading (particle physics, Shakespeare, etc.) the group projects have assigned groups and force me to set deadlines for the other members of my group as well as teach them the material they must learn. If I don't do that I fail, too.

When asked “What would you say is a bigger source of your school issues: being black or gifted” she further stated:
I'm not sure. If I were just black (and like blacks on TV) or just gifted or just female I would get along better. I think if I was a white male my social problems would be solved. Female intellectuals are second worst to being a black intellectual. Even the girls don't believe in female intellectuals. My gifted and talented teacher is particularly strong in this opinion, even though she's a woman. She won't believe that I read Shakespeare or physics or anything more intellectual than "The Princess Diaries" (teen girl lit). Over spring break I did some research on cellular automata using math world web site, mathematical software, and "A New Kind of Science" (a very very heavy Christmas present I finally got this year) and she won't believe me. She doesn't do this to the boys even if their lying about what their reading (a cartoon series of Shakespeare, not the real thing).

When asked if her teacher behaves this way towards other students, Amanda stated:

“no. the other girls don't try to make themselves into intellectuals, so who else could she treat this way? Surely not those white males!”

Although our dialogue was online, I could sense the student’s disgust based upon the details of her responses, which also connoted the degree of importance she attributed to telling her story. As such, I desired to learn more, so I asked her which of her identities is most difficult to navigate (race, giftedness, or gender). She responded with:

Worst is probably my race, then my gender, then my giftedness. But the combo is positively deadly. Because it means that on no level (my looks, interests, whatever) do I comply with their expectations. They expect girls to behave a certain way (to be boy crazy), I don't. They expect blacks to behave like rappers, I don't. They expect gifted students to believe certain things (about politics, religion, etc.), I don't. I don't accept their stereotypes and don't follow them and that bothers them.

Amanda perceived that teachers treat gifted African American students differently, which was a quite common belief amongst respondents. In fact, Shanice [female, 87-92
G.P.A.] also offers an explicit example of a negative experience with a gifted education teacher:

My Geometry honors teacher is one of those people. If I get every question right on an assignment she will accuse me of cheating....if I get every question wrong she will talk to me and tell me that I must not study and that I don’t participate and that "I need more consistent good effort" the comments she makes about me on my report card contradict those of my other 5 teachers who say I am "a pleasure to have in class" that I am "an independent worker" that I am "a self starter and a quick study"....or that I am "consistent in excellence" ...for example....the other African American student receives the same treatment from this teacher but the other students in the class do not. If such treatment is common among those who are African American I have to assume that either they all perform below the bar or she singles out those people.

This belief was reiterated by Shariff [male, 93-100 G.P.A.] who stated that “…they [gifted teachers] think black kids are all the same”

Students. Although participants mentioned that teachers treat students differently in gifted classrooms, far more common was the differential treatment participants said they received from other students. In the words of Kelly [female]: “I hate the fact that people assume that I know everything related to “black living” because I am black…. [I also get] laughed at when I talk different.” It is not difficult to believe that given the small number of African American students in gifted education classrooms, there may be a tendency for African American students to feel awkward. For example, Brian [male, 93-100 G.P.A.] reported that, overall, he has had a good experience in gifted education. However, “when we talk about black history month i feel uncomfortable...because I’m in a room with mostly white people so they can’t relate.”
Brian has experienced a certain level of discomfort as a result of being one of the few African American students in a gifted education classroom. However, participants also expressed negative treatment at the hands of non-gifted or “normal” students in addition to their gifted peers. According to Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.], “The normal kids will not accept you for being gifted. In fact, they try to bring you down and call you dumb.” However, as evidenced by Angela’s quote, gifted African American students must navigate perils outside of gifted education classrooms, as well.  

4.5.8 “…friends don’t even know that I’m in gifted...”: Stigma

Participants’ assertions of differential treatment by teachers and students as a function of their race, giftedness, and gender suggested that there was a stigma attached to these identities—race and giftedness, particularly. As an example, Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.] discussed the difficulties that accompany being a gifted African American student in a school with a large African American population. She stated that “…it is very difficult being gifted at a [predominantly] A[frican] A[merican] school. You don’t fit in, you really want to but you can’t.” When asked if it would be easier for her if she went to a predominantly White school, she said, “nooo because that’s more white kids to give me bad looks I don’t need that….I’m better off in a black school in gifted classes.” She went on to say that dealing with gifted issues as a Black student in a predominantly White school would be more of a problem “because they [White students] would [look] at my skin color first and not the fact that I’m just smart and need a school to attend.”
Clearly, Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.] found race to be an issue. In fact, the majority of participants in this study considered race to be the most difficult identity to navigate in middle school compared to giftedness and gender. For example, Kelly [female] stated that gifted African American students “get it a lot harder [being] a minority. We get a lot of stereotypes that we need help breaking.” Echoing this thought, Amanda [female, 93-100 G.P.A.] asserted that, “If the world could see that we’re just like other gifted students, then life would improve. If people could see past how someone looks and see that we’re just as brilliant, then things would be so much better.”

For some participants, however, race was not a significant issue because they had been in their gifted programs for an extended period of time or their school was predominantly Black. For instance, Samantha [female, 9th grade, 87-92 G.P.A.] mentioned, during the interview, that she was identified as gifted in either the fourth or fifth grade. She went on to say that “I was mainly the only Black person [so]....at first I was a little uncomfortable but over the years it hasn’t been too bad”

According to Samantha, the discomfort associated with being one of the few African Americans in a gifted program seemed to decrease over time. In fact, she reported that there was actually no differential treatment by students toward her at all. Nevertheless, the student mentioned a level of discomfort at first entry into the gifted program. Depending upon the intensity level, this feeling could have an adverse affect on a gifted African American student’s academic and/or personal/social performance in school (Ford, 1996). For example, when asked, “Do you think your experience in school would be different if you were in gifted classes with predominantly White
students?” Samantha replied: “Yes. I think I wouldn’t be as comfortable being myself as I am now because I guess if I’m around a certain crowd, I tend to act how they want me to act.” This is a further illustration of the effect that standing out can have on gifted African American students. However, already mentioned, students who attend schools and/or gifted programs that are predominantly Black tended to fare better because when “…most of the children around me are African American. The best thing about that is that I can have people around me that understand me” [Keshia, female, 87-92 G.P.A.].

Samantha also suggested that same-race schools may lead to fewer physical altercations between students. She reported that “at my other [middle] school, the race population was about equal between Black, Hispanic, and White, and people were always against each other, always trying to fight one another. There’s no fighting at my [high] school now.” It must be mentioned, however, that Samantha attended a magnet school consisting of all gifted students. As such, one could argue that the lack of fighting in the school could be due to this fact or any number of other conditions that exists in the context of a magnet school with predominantly gifted students.

Each participant in this study referred to the substantial stigma that accompanied them once they were identified as gifted. The terms “smart kid,” “know it all,” and “nerd” were most often used to describe how others perceived students who participate in gifted programs. For example, Kelly [female] said that “it has been pretty challenging to be known as the “smart kid” in school…I don’t like the stereotype that I get. I am considered a ‘know-it-all’…” A male student reported that non-gifted students sometimes “get the wrong idea about the gifted program and think that everyone in it is
a nerd” [Brian, male, 03-100]. In fact, Mason [male] reported that his friend have no clue that he is gifted. Moreover, he said that if he told them, they probably wouldn’t believe him.

The stigma attached to being identified as gifted seemed to transcend race as evidenced by students reporting that they received negative treatment from Blacks as well as White gifted and non-gifted students. In response, students desired to distance themselves from their gifted identity. In the following excerpt, for example, it was apparent that the student wanted to distinguish herself from gifted students. However, she also validated her own giftedness by mentioning that all of her teachers say that she is smart:

Henfield: Are you proud to be known as gifted?
Angela: Nah. It don't do anything for me. It’s not benefiting me. My mother is very happy...but it doesn't change me
Henfield: Do you see any benefit to taking gifted courses
Angela: No
Henfield: Do you do well in them
Angela: Yes my teachers think I’m very smart, but I really don’t think much of it. it just give me a "big head" but it don't benefit me [female, 83-86 G.P.A.].

This exchange echoes a common theme in which many of the participants, although valuing their giftedness, wanted to be known as “different” from the gifted students in order to protect themselves from the stigma attached to giftedness. Similarly, Brian [male, 93-100 G.P.A.] also attempted to disassociate himself from his gifted identity. He did so by acknowledging that he is gifted but stating that “many of the other [gifted] kids are workaholics. Many of them stress about every test and assignment. I am very relaxed about everything.” When asked how well he performed academically in
comparison to them, he responded that he gets the same or “sometimes even better”
grades as the other gifted students. It is quite evident that Brian values his giftedness but
wanted to dissociate himself from stereotypical perceptions of gifted students (e.g.,
narrowly focused on academic achievement) as a means to manage his precarious status
as a gifted African American student.

It is interesting to note that, although participants reported that it was their
identity as African Americans that was most difficult to manage in middle school, many
predicted that giftedness would be the most difficult role to navigate in high school.
Students gave responses ranging from, “Well, people would not want to interact with
you because they think you are not ‘cool’” to “I might get picked on for being
somewhat smarter than others,” and “Being a gifted student [would be most difficult in
high school] because people would make fun of me.” However, one student also
pointed out the interaction of race and giftedness as being the most difficult identity to
be confronted in high school: “I think the combination of being African American and
smart will be hard [in high school], because it’s not what people expect [Kelly, female].
Indeed, many students mentioned confronting stereotypes and expectations as a
tremendous difficulty in the experience as gifted African American students.

4.6 General Perceptions of Non-giftedness

As reported earlier, participants had clearly identifiable attitudes toward gifted
education and giftedness in general. Additionally, they also had perceptions about non-
gifted students or students who were not members of gifted education programs. Some
participants seemed to “look down on” non-gifted students or think of non-gifted students as a lower class of student than gifted students. In other words, gifted students seemed to “other” the non-gifted students.

Interestingly, however, there appeared to be a tension between gifted African American students’ respect for their giftedness and their desire to be treated like the non-gifted students in their respective schools. Participants repeatedly stated their desire to be treated as thought they were “normal” or “regular,” that is, like the students who had not been accepted into gifted education programs. Unfortunately, if non-gifted students are thought of as “normal,” then gifted students may be viewed as abnormal by students in the school as a whole.

4.6.1 “I’m very different…”: Normalcy of Non-giftedness

Gifted students perceiving non-students as “normal” or “regular” was a common theme of the study. For example one female participant that she “used to be in normal classes in the beginning of the year but when I got transferred, the normal kids hardly ever talk to me” [Angela, 83-86 G.P.A.]. She continued: “Non-gifted students treat me like a genius, which I hate because I would like to be considered normal. Gifted students treat me like I’m normal which is how I want others to treat me.” This student’s use of the word “other” suggested that non-gifted students are considered to be different from gifted students. The researcher analyzed the data for more instances of non-gifted students referred to as “others” and found quite a few examples. For instance, Keshia [female, 87-92 G.P.A.] mentioned that “[gifted students] need help with work just like other students”. Amanda [female, 93-100 G.P.A.] appeared to be
quite resentful—almost envious—of non-gifted students, as explained by her response that teachers “want [non-gifted] kids only to pass; so more funds and time are spent on the kids who do poorly than overachievers like me.” Other respondents seemed to echo these sentiments by making such statements as, “Ungifted student want to make a lot of money but don’t want to do the work” [Carlos, male, 87-92 G.P.A.], and “We are very different in terms of personality, and/or thought. The majority of non-gifted kids that I see are the stereotype that I wouldn’t fit in with. The ebonics, the clothes, the behavior. I’m very different in terms of attitude and behavior” [Cortland, male, 93-100 G.P.A.].

Although some students appeared to have a low opinion of non-gifted students, or simply perceived non-gifted students as “different” from gifted students, others expressed the belief that non-gifted students also had the ability to achieve academically. For example: “Non-gifted students do have these [same] opportunities [as gifted students]. They just have to do good in school. I don’t think you have to be gifted” [Michelle, female, 93-100]. Another student, downplaying the differences between gifted and non-gifted students said that they are “just like any other student. We all want success which starts in school” [Shariff, male, 93-100 G.P.A.].

4.6.2 “…many people would not know who I am because there would be no reason 2…”: Desire for Acceptance

As mentioned earlier, whether to distance themselves from “abnormal” gifted students or to affiliate themselves with “normal” non-gifted students, respondents consistently appeared to desire acceptance from non-gifted students. Many of the students mentioned the salience non-gifted students attach to extracurricular activities
and, as such, identified participation in extracurricular activities as a means to gain acceptance from non-gifted students. For example, Brian [male, 93-100 G.P.A.], who plays football, said that if he didn’t play, “people wouldn’t say hey good game and compliment me like they do now. I have been used to that since kindergarten they’d think I was just another nerd.” Similarly, Carlos [male, 87-92 G.P.A.] said that he gets treated well by non-gifted students, because he plays sports with them and he is very athletic. As further evidence of this point, the following respondent described an experience in which extracurricular activities bridged the gap between himself and non-gifted students:

Henfield: How do non-gifted students treat you?
Shariff: They treat like a normal person
Shariff: "me"
Henfield: Earlier you said that you used to get called names. When was that going on?
Shariff: That started on the first day of school in the sixth grade.
Henfield: When did it stop?
Shariff: It stopped when our P.E. coach started a b-ball game and people saw I had other talents that just being smart
Henfield: was it gifted or non-gifted students doing the teasing
Shariff: Non-gifted
Henfield: Black or white
Shariff: Both

The previous examples seem to demonstrate that regardless of participants’ perceptions of non-gifted students, many still wanted the acceptance of non-gifted students. This could be due to the lack of African American representation in gifted programs, which has been shown to create a sense of discomfort among some gifted students. This finding also makes sense given that participants mentioned race as being the most difficult identity to navigate in middle school.
4.7 General Perceptions of Gender

Comments related to gender varied from broad generalizations to examples of specific experiences. Nevertheless, what remained consistent were the negative perceptions of females by both male and female respondents. Many of the respondents, including females, accused all females of having “emotional problems” or of being “unstable,” suggesting that males were viewed as stable. This may also account for females being reported as the group of students who visited the school counselor most often, a point that will be discussed further.

4.7.1 “Female intellectuals are second worst to being a black.”: Females’ Negative Educational Experiences

Participants frequently described the mistreatment of females in gifted programs. Indeed, in an earlier section, a detailed excerpt was presented detailing the difficulties Amanda [female, 93-100 G.P.A.] has experienced as a gifted female African American student. When asked if she felt that a school counselor could assist with her problems, she said “No!!!!!!!!!!!! They would probably agree with the students (because most of the teachers do) and wouldn't have the power to change the way the students and teachers think or what they believe.” She went on to say that “the people they send out for jobs like that are basically all air-heads and don't understand me one bit...like I said they don't believe I'm as smart as those boys.”

Other females, described their experiences in a negative fashion because of personal/social issues. For instance, Kelly said that “girls have to try hardest to fit in.” She also predicted that “in high school, most teens find out about their sexuality, and I
think pressure will come about what I wear and who I hang out with.” Indeed, as mentioned earlier, participants reported that of all the students in their schools, that females, regardless of race or giftedness, were the population that visited the school counselor most often. When asked for an explanation, a majority of the students (both male and female) reported issues that were, again, personal/social in nature. For instance, Carlos [male, 87-92 G.P.A.] claimed that females see the school counselor the most in his school “because they are emotional.” In support of this assertion, Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.] suggested that females get into the most fights in the school “because they gossip the most.”

Students were more specific regarding the types of issues for which females sought the assistance of school counselors. For example, according to Kelly [female] “most Black girls act real ghetto and like to fight all the time….’’ She went on to say that this was occurring because “it’s the girls fighting over the guys. Well, guys fight over girls sometimes I guess, but it’s a lot more common for girls to fight over boys.” A male student explained that non-gifted females see the counselor specifically “because a lot of them are always involved in drama dealing with boys or family. The gifted girls don’t really seem to have family problems” [Brian, male, 93-100].

Keshia [female, 87-92 G.P.A.] reported that “it’s good to be a female student at my school. The best thing about that is that we as females get the most attention from the males. And I don’t think that anything is bad about that.” Males also appeared to be at the crux of many issues pertaining to females, according to the respondents.

Interestingly, male participants were asked: “What is the best about being a male in
your school? And what is the worst?” Most often they replied that there was nothing
bad or good about being a male in their school, suggesting that being a male was
“normal.” In fact, the delayed response from the male participants when asked this
question suggested that they had never thought of themselves solely as males. It was
quite common among the males to report that there was nothing good or bad about
being a male, or that the attention received from females was a function of being a male
in a school, where they are outnumbered by females.

4.8 General Perceptions of Race

Of all the themes that emerged from the data, participants’ perceptions of race
were the most consistent.

4.8.1 “We get a lot of stereotypes that we need help breaking”: Confronting Stereotypes

Many of the respondents acknowledged that they must confront many
stereotypes as a function of being identified as gifted. Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.]
offers an example of how the African Americans in her gifted class respond to the
pressure to dispel the myth that African American students can not succeed in gifted
education programs:

Henfield: Oh ok. What about the other AA students? Are your needs
similar to them?
Angela: OH because I can do without help, I’ve never raised my hands to
ask any teachers for help. I rather sit there the whole class hour
and figure it out by myself
Henfield: That's right. You like challenges right?
Henfield: What if you just couldn't figure out the answer to a question?
Angela: Well I would put my head down or look at another problem
Angela: If none of that works my teachers always catch on
Henfield: Is it embarrassing to ask questions in gifted classes?
Angela: Yes because the gifted teachers expect you to know everything
and so do the other gifted kids
Henfield: Both the AA and the white kids?
Angela: Yes actually you wouldn't believe this, but the white kids actually ask for help when they need it, while the AA students try to figure it out
Henfield: Why is that?
Angela: I think because we expect ourselves to be better than the white kids and know the stuff
Henfield: So it seems like you are more interested in doing the work than getting all of the answers right
Angela: Well no... When I do my work my make sure to get ALL the answers right. But I just never feel the need to ask for help
Henfield: But the other AA kids...when they need help but don't ask....why is that
Angela: Because they have too much pride. they see it as a privilege to be in gifted or honors classes, and if the teachers see that u don’t understand the work they’ll remove you
Henfield: Oh ok. They’re afraid of being kicked out of the classes. That would be embarrassing for them?
Angela: No more of a let down to their parents like i said the kids in there are just adapting to their role of being snobby they come from that. They won't fit in with the regular classes. That’s long gone.

The excerpt above highlights an interesting phenomenon. Again, students appeared to value their giftedness and wanted to be known as “different” from the gifted students.

However, the excerpt describes students responding in such a way that can be described as “self-censoring” or “in deliberate torpedoing” of their talents; apparently, rather than ask for help from their teacher, students were intentionally academically disengaging. Not having to ask for help appeared to be a source of pride, as well. Indeed, generally speaking, these students felt the need to be viewed as independent. It is interesting to note that Angela has the lowest G.P.A. of all students who participated in the study.

As previously mentioned, even though race appeared to play a dangerous roles in the lives of some of these students, some seemed to be more adept at managing their discomfort with racial stereotypes when they (a) attended majority Black schools and
(b) had been in the same gifted programs with the same students for an extended period of time. Additionally, Amanda [female, 93-100 G.P.A.] reported a lack of Black intellectual role models in her school and indicated that the lack of Black intellectuals may have contributed to racial stereotyping and offers the following explanation:

These students have never seen a black intellectual before. They don't know what to believe. They hear so many stories about the "ghetto" from rappers and adore that culture. I'm not ghetto. I've never been there and I don't know any thing about it. I'm not like the black people on TV. They don't accept that I can be smart even though I get all A's and test well. Last week our gifted program had a quiz bowl. I know most of the answers and called them out correctly all the time. Before they would type the answers in, they had to be confirmed by a white, male student and we lost thousands of points because they wouldn't believe me. They only used 2 out of 200 of my answers without confirmation. And if they had seen a black intellectual before it might not be like this.

In spite of multiple examples of difficulties pertaining to confronting racial stereotypes, all participants mentioned how proud they are to be Black and the admiration they have for African American historical figures who have overcome many challenges.

4.8.2 “...they try to get in where they don’t fit in...”: Acting White

Gifted African American students often described being put in a position of defending their identities as “real” African Americans or risking being characterized as “acting White.” Many of the participants in this study had, at one time or another, been told or knew someone who had been told that they “act White.” The one student who had never heard of the term attended a small, rural school with an extremely small enrollment of Black students (see Appendix A).

When asked what it means to act White, the students offered an array of responses:
it means they try to get in where they don’t fit in… they try to talk and act white and has nothing to do with his race… you have a black voice but you try to use white slang or terms when it is obvious that u are simply trying to fit in. They try to act like…u know….that is not how they really are [Carlos, male, 87-92 G.P.A.].

One student who was accused of acting White offered the following: “Yeah they called me a cracker. Saying that I sounded White. I thought I was smart. A nerd, just everything possible” [Angela, female, 83-86 G.P.A.]. Another student explained acting White as such:

I’m one of those kids; many of my friends say that I’m white. I also had whiggers [White niggers], or whatever you’d like to call them, say that they are Blacker than me. When someone says that to me, I think what they mean by that is that I don’t act like the stereotypical young Black person. Meaning I don’t wear the clothes, I don’t talk the talk, walk the walk, or behave the same way [Cortland, male, 93-100 G.P.A.].

Other students stated that acting White is simply being happy or without problems, as opposed to Black students, who have hardships outside of school that impact their functioning in school. For example: “From what I’ve observed, the white kids are happier they are freer…free to be happy…free to be loved. All of that. black kids go through so much they come to school and take it out on everything and everyone, including there selves, especially their work” [Angela, female, 83-86 G.P.A.].

It is interesting to note that, in an earlier section, Angela mentioned that White students ask for help and Black students do not. Thus, a student who is engaged academically may be defined as acting White in some gifted environments.

4.8.3 “…they have adapted to their roles, to what they are labeled as, and they are fine with it.”: Acting Black

When asked more probing questions to gain a better grasp of what these students perceived to be acting White, most students responded, by defining acting White as the opposite of acting Black. At that point the researcher thought to himself, “Acting
black…that’s a new term.” Even though he was familiar with the term by reading the book called Acting Black, by Willie (2003). Nevertheless the researcher had never heard the term mentioned in reference to the behavior of gifted students. However, the term was mentioned repeatedly throughout the study.

Most students, when asked the definition of acting White, described it as “the opposite of acting Black.” From this response, the researcher began a line of questioning aimed at uncovering what it means to act Black. When the researcher first began asking questions pertaining to this construct, students offered definitions similar to the following: “Acting white is preppy, rock or pop. Saying stuff like ‘cool’ and ‘sweet’…lol…and acting black is rap, baggy jeans, sweats, laid back, and saying a lot of profanity” [Angela, female, 83-86, G.P.A.]. Based upon this and other similar definitions, the researcher began to understand acting Black as a product of popular culture. More specifically, the researcher began to see acting Black as “having a hip hop attitude or gangsta acting. The stereotype that is seen on TV. The music they listen to is rap” [Kelly, female]. However, it was at this point one of the students made the following statement which forced me to rethink this definition:

The worst thing about it [being African American], however, is that many people at our school see African Americans as ghetto. So I’m constantly surrounded by kids trying to ‘act black,’ whatever that is, and it is really annoying. Being in gifted cuts me off from the black kids that are in regular classes, but it doesn’t bother me much. Since we are very different [Cortland, 93-100 G.P.A].

The researcher then began to understand acting Black to be more than a blanket extension of popular culture, specifically, hip hop culture. Toward this end, he also realized that the term was not specific to White students. Acting Black, it became clear,
had distinct meanings depending upon the race of the individual who is reported to be acting Black.

*White Students Acting Black.* It appeared that the initial meaning the researcher attributed to acting Black was correct but only in the case of White students who act Black. After asking many questions on the topic, he researcher felt he had a decent grasp of the difference. Apparently, gifted African American students believed that White students who act Black have an appreciation for the Black race. For example, one student reported that “mostly everyone in our school rather be African American…even the white kids” [Angela, female, 83-86 G. P.A.]. When asked more about this, she said “the black kids run the school. The white kids want to do everything black people prefer to do. Including listening to rap, dressing in a certain dress code. Using profanity. Saying the new slang.” When asked if she had ever heard someone say that a white kid was acting black, she responded: “lol [laugh out loud]…yes very much! I had one white kid say ‘man I wish I was black’ and me being me i said ‘I’ll give you half of my skin color’ and he said ‘I would take it too’…just things like that.”

Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.] attended a predominantly African American school. However, Keshia [female, 87-92 G.P.A.], who attended a predominantly White school, offered similar remarks:

**Henfield:** Have you ever heard a student say that another white student is "acting like he or she is black?" If so, what did they mean by that?

**Keshia:** Now I heard that but I didn’t know what they meant
**Henfield:** Did you know the student they were talking about?

**Keshia:** No not really

**Henfield:** Oh ok. did the person who said it seem like they were saying a good or a bad thing about the other student?
Keshia: I thought that they were saying that in a good way
Henfield: Like its good to be black?
Keshia: Yes like that

Black Students Acting Black. “So, what does it mean for Black students to act Black?” In turn, the researcher asked the students. Their responses appeared to have an overwhelmingly negative undertone. For example, one student described it as “acting ignorant” [Michelle, female, 93-100 G.P.A.]. She went on to say that people who act Black usually get lower grades than people who act White. Another response offered: “when someone [a Black person] ‘acts black’ they tend to lean into the black stereotype. Thuggish, ebonics, slurred speech, acting stupid” [Cortland, male, 93-100 G.P.A.]. By far, the most common description of acting Black was to act “ghetto.” Upon hearing this description, the researcher saw acting Black as a class statement, meaning that one who acts Black is poor. When he checked with one of the respondents as to the definition of ghetto(member checking), her response confirmed this notion. According to Samantha (female, 87-92 G.P.A), ghetto is “a term used for someone or a place in which the children will grow up and wont have privileges. Or like a ghetto girl would be…those girls who fights quickly for anything because that’s just how they are. It’s kinda hard to explain….they live in the ghetto or act like they do.

Understanding that “ghetto” is a class statement and has been attached to acting Black, it was assumed that acting Black was a derogatory term when used to describe Black students. In an effort to find additional evidence for this thought, the researcher checked with another member and asked, “So acting White is doing well and acting Black is doing poorly [in school]?” In response to this question, Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.] said that he was “right on the money.” Further supporting this claim, when he
asked Angela, “Does acting Black mean that you’re not supposed to do well in school,”

she responded,

Hmmmmm….well yes….kind of. They expect you to be a little slower
than the white kids you know….only fascinated in music and
clothes….and the African Americans actually buy that and they adapt to
it….thinking that they don’t amount to anything but the music.

Similarly, Cortland [male, 93-100 G.P.A.], when asked to compare the academic
performance of students who act White to students who act Black, said the following:

The average black kid at our school has the bad grades. C (IF they are
lucky), D, and F’s. They don’t care about school, they don’t care about
homework, and they don’t care about what they are being taught. Many
times I’ve seen kids copy off the homework from another kid before their
class starts. The black kid who is considered white tends to care about
what they do academically.

4.9 General Perceptions of School Counselors

Generally speaking, for various reasons, students reported that school counselors
were of no use to them. Thus, school counseling services were reported as drastically
underutilized by the participants in this study. Nevertheless, gifted African American
students have been found to encounter considerable difficulties in their schools as a
function of being “gifted” and “African American.” Moreover, gender also played an
integral role in exacerbating these difficulties, as was the case with many of the females
in this study.

4.9.1 “They're there to help those who are like having problems.”: The “Othering” of
School Counseling Services

It has already been established that both male and female respondents in this
study perceived that females visit the school counselor most often because of
“emotional problems.” In relation to this belief, an obvious theme was found to be the
perception of school counselors as servers of those with “problems” or those who “get into trouble.” Overwhelmingly, students reported that they had never visited their school counselors, with reasons such as, “I don’t have a problem” or “I stay out of trouble,” being commonplace. In that sense, it could be argued that these students thought school counselors were useless unless they had some sort of “problem” or “get into trouble.” For instance, Brian [male, 93-100 G.P.A.] stated that he doesn’t go to his school counselor because “I stay out of trouble.” Additionally, Michelle [female, 93-100 G.P.A.] said that she doesn’t visit her school counselor because “they're there to help those who are like having problems at home or emotional problems. and school things.” It is interesting to note that the majority of students who mentioned that they do not see their school counselor were male. Although students may think of school counselors as staff relegated to serving the needs of students with “emotional problems,” one could also argue that males view school counselors as providers of services to “females with emotional troubles,” thus deciding not to receive school counseling services because of the gender stigma attached to seeing the school counselor as well as the stigma of appearing “emotionally unstable.”

School Counselor Deficiencies. The tendency in educational research is to examine the system designed to serve students in order to explore ways in which the system has “failed” students. For example, one of the students in this study commented: “To be honest, I really don’t know who my school counselor is…” [Cortland, 93-100 G.P.A.]. This response was an obvious indictment as to the level of visibility or invisibility of the school counselor. In fact, most of the students interviewed for this
study had very little interaction with their school counselors. With this in mind, many students, in turn, reported that they were uncomfortable with their school counselors.

Of those students who had experience with their school counselors, it was reported that either their time spent with them was not helpful (e.g., “I really don’t do anything with my school counselor. I help her when she needs it like deliver slips for her or carry things out her car to places they need to be” [Shariff, 93-100 G.P.A.], or was a negative experience. For example, this student detailed multiple encounters with her school counselor that could be described as negative in nature:

From my experiences with my school counselor, she is unsupportive and insensitive…when it comes to schedule changes and issues [pertaining to that] she helps but when it comes to personal, academic, or social matters she does not…rather than helping you find a solution to your problems, she attacks your feelings and ideas by telling students that the way they feel is wrong or illogical…[Shanice, 87-92 G.P.A.].

4.9.2 “...you are taught to have to much pride to ask for help.”: Student Strengths

As noted in the research literature, the meanings some students construct about their schools shape their responses, which may not necessarily be in their best interests (Cusick, 1973; Fordham, 1999; Mickelson, 1990; Ogbu, 1978). If this is true, then it stands to reason that students also develop responses that may be in their best interests. It has already been established that African Americans may encounter considerable difficulties in gifted programs. Additionally, according to the findings of this study, it is also quite evident that students are not utilizing school counseling services, and, when they do, fail to receive the quality assistance they desire. However, this finding does not necessarily mean that these students are not getting their needs met. On the contrary, the
participants in this study were found to be quite adept at getting their needs met—without the assistance of school counselors.

**Independence.** As mentioned earlier, gifted African American students appeared to be extremely strong and independent. Even when they admitted that they had needs, they would rather face their problems on their own. For example, when Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.] was asked why she doesn’t meet with her school counselor for academic difficulties, she said that her school counselor “gets enough of those complaints from other students and she don't need another whiner.” She went on to say that “white kids come to her and tell her how their doing in their classes and MOST of the AA's [African Americans] go to her and complain saying they wanna get out their classes or how hard it is.” When asked what subject she needs help with, she said math, and even stated that she would like her school counselor to assign her a tutor to help her. However, she ended by saying that she wouldn’t ask her school counselor for assistance: “I don’t want to whine. I can make it without a tutor.”

Even for something as fundamental as encouragement, which participants mentioned as a benefit of being identified as gifted, students were unwilling to meet with their school counselors. For example, Carlos [male, 87-92 G.P.A.], who believes offering encouragement is a function of school counselors, stated that he doesn’t meet with his school counselor because he is “self motivate[d],” which suggests that encouragement from school counselors are of no use to him. This independent attitude also seemed to manifest itself in the classroom, however. As mentioned earlier, some students, such as Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.] would rather disengage academically
before asking a teacher for help. However, Mason [male] also stated that when he
encounters problems academically, rather than ask a teacher for help, he would rather
“just try harder.”

Influence of Family. According to participants, family members have a strong
influence on their experience in gifted education. For example, Shariff [male, 93-100
G.P.A.] stated that he was always comfortable in gifted courses:

...when I was brought up by mom I was taught a lot of things at a very
young age so that when I got older and used my knowledge I would not be
scared...she said that if I get into gifted classes the classes would help
prepare me for life and help me get a high paying job. That way when I
get paid I can by her a new luxury car.

In addition to showing an independent attitude, the previous excerpt revealed that
family members play a significant role in the lives of gifted African American students.
In fact, Shariff went on to state that the goal of buying his mother a car is what helps
motivate him to succeed in school. Indeed, family members were shown to be a
motivating factor in the lives of these students. As mentioned earlier, Angela [female,
83-86 G.P.A.] even suggested that some students were afraid of being kicked out of
gifted classes for fear of embarrassing their parents. Parents were also found to
intentionally instill a sense of pride, which in turn directly influenced the student’s help-
seeking behaviors. For example, according to Samantha [female, 87-92 G.P.A.], “most
of the time growing up in a black home you are taught to have to much pride to ask for
help...especially from teachers...or counselors.” Thus, parents were responsible for
teaching their child not to ask for assistance.
Influence of Teachers. The previous quote from Samantha demonstrated the influence of parents in the lives of their gifted children, specifically in terms of shaping these students’ help-seeking behaviors. However, in the excerpt, it was explained that parents teach gifted African American students not to seek the help of school counselors and teachers. Nevertheless, there were numerous examples of students reporting to their teachers for assistance with various problems. Carlos [male, 87-92 G.P.A.], in fact, explained that he believed that his school counselor could probably help him with his problems, but he would rather go to his parents or teachers for assistance. Furthermore, rather than speak directly to his school counselor, the individual stated he would rather the counselor speak to his teacher on his behalf and advocate for him as a student.

Again, students repeatedly maintained that they did not feel comfortable with their school counselors. However, they also argued that they felt comfortable with their teachers and would “rather go to a teacher that I know, rather than school counselor who I really don’t know” [Cortland, 93-100 G.P.A.]. One female participant who attended a school without a school counselor maintained that students in her school did not have a need for a school counselor, because their teachers sufficiently met the students’ needs:

we don’t really have school counselor, our teachers are always there for us we're all pretty comfortable with out teachers....when there are family problems, personal problems, friendship problems...in some ways everyone of my school's teachers is a counselor....it would be weird going to someone you barely talk to compared to a cool fun teacher you see and talk to everyday for an hour and a half [Samantha, 93-100 G.P.A.].

Another student who experienced school counseling services suggested that she’d rather go to a teacher because “they generally respond in a more timely manner
and generate better results and compromises” [Shanice, 87-92 G.P.A.]. This response, in addition to the previous excerpt, seems to suggest that participants perceived teachers as more capable than counselors in terms of meeting the needs of gifted African American students. This sentiment was also echoed by another student, who stated that school counselors “aren't really necessary but then again they are” [Samantha, 93-100 G.P.A.]. When I asked her for clarification of her statement I said, “they aren’t necessary but they are. do you mean the services they provide are necessary but the position of school counselor isn’t....like teachers and others can help you with that stuff,” to which she responded “exactly! There ya go! I couldn’t have said it better myself! Lol [laugh out loud].” Clearly, when the majority of students were asked if they would talk to their school counselors about a personal/social, academic, or career-related topic, they reported that they would try to “fix” the problem on their own and if they could not, they would talk to a family member, teacher, or friend before discussing it with a school counselor.

4.10 Summary

The previous sections of this chapter offered a thorough description of the subthemes that developed following rigorous analysis of the data by the researcher and his research team (i.e., the research team.). From these subthemes, the research team formulated a listing of the following overarching themes: (a) critical issues facing gifted African American students; (b) navigating perils; (c) benefits of gifted identification;
(d) perceptions of non-gifted students; and (e) perceptions of school counselors. A thorough discussion of the themes/subthemes will be offered in chapter five.
CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the following five overarching themes emerged from the raw data: (a) critical issues facing gifted African American students; (b) navigating perils; (c) benefits of gifted identification; (d) perceptions of non-gifted students; and (e) perceptions of school counselors. The following section will detail how each of these themes answers the research questions that were the foundation of the current study.

5.1.1 Research Question 1

How do gifted African American students perceive being gifted? How do these perceptions differ on the basis of gender?

Using interpretivism (Schwandt, 2000) and CRT (Bernal, 2002; Delgado, 1995) as theoretical underpinnings, the meanings gifted African American students attribute to their giftedness, gender, and race in the context of gifted education programs was explored. According to interpretivistic assumptions, human beings are active creators of meanings—meanings that are consequential for the ways in which they live their lives. CRT, in contrast, essentially takes the position that race has significant meaning in human life and offers a framework for an “understanding of how race and racism affect education and lives of the racially disenfranchised” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 8).
Critical Issues Facing Gifted African American Students. Students mentioned numerous critical issues endured, as a result of being one of the few gifted African American students in their schools. Frequently, the word “normal” was used to describe the way they desired to be treated by educators and their peers. In fact, normal students were perceived to be non-gifted students or students who are not enrolled in gifted classes; thus, it is not difficult to understand that they perceived themselves, as gifted students, to be abnormal. As such, they attached a stigma to their identity as abnormal gifted students and desired to be classified in the normal sense, as opposed to “just another nerd.”

A number of participants made claims of experiencing differential treatment by teachers in their gifted classes. Specifically, some female respondents spoke of instances where they were discouraged intellectually by teachers who had low expectations of gifted African American students in general and females in particular. In addition to this discouragement in the classroom, participants also mentioned being ridiculed outside of the classroom by non-gifted students for being a “nerd,” “geek,” and “know-it-all.”

To this end, students spoke explicitly of standing out or being viewed differently by educators and students because they were gifted. Some students enjoyed the recognition that accompanied being one of the few African American students identified as gifted in their schools. However, many students offered contrasting accounts; stating repeatedly that they wanted to be considered normal students. They shunned the notion that, as a function of their unique giftedness, they ought to gravitate
towards the role of being a leader to African Americans in their schools, although this was expected of them by their teachers.

The females, in particular, mentioned that their experience in school were extremely difficult, because they were forced to confront many stereotypes and dispel many myths. Similar to the males in the study, females repeatedly stated that contending with teachers and peers who think of African Americans in terms of deficit ideological notions was inevitable given the lack of African American students represented in gifted education programs. However, the females, in addition to race, were also faced with proving wrong the stereotypes that females are not on the same level, intellectually, as males. Specifically, it was reported that gifted education teachers viewed females in “anti-intellectualism” terms. In fact, it was reported that one teacher refused to believe that a female student would take an interest in advanced literature, math, and sciences.

Interestingly, however, both males and females considered gender to be the least difficult of the identities (i.e., gender, race, and giftedness) to manage—further illuminating the significance of race and giftedness in the lives of these students. Moreover, it was reported that in middle school, race was the most difficult identity, but, they predicted in high school, their giftedness would present the biggest challenge because they would be forced to interact more with non-gifted students and may be ridiculed for standing out.

_Navigating Perils._ It is imperative to understand that these students attribute meanings to their individual and collective experiences as gifted African American
students. These meanings, subsequently, result in specific actions and/or inactions in response to their environment. As such, the tactics they utilized to navigate the aforementioned critical issues associated with being identified as gifted made perfect sense.

When faced with difficult circumstances, the students, as a function of their pride chose to find resolutions independently. For example, Angela [female, 83-86 G.P.A.] mentioned that, rather than ask a teacher for assistance with a class assignment, she would “rather sit there the whole class hour and figure it out by myself.” When asked what she would do if she still could not figure it out, she stated following: “I would put my head down or look at another problem.” In this case, giving off the appearance of academic disengagement (Ogbu, 2003) seemed to be an understandable reaction, when it is understood. From this student’s perspective, “it is a privilege to be in gifted or honors classes, and if the teachers see that u don’t understand the work they'll remove you.” Indeed, there is considerable pressure to give off this appearance when “gifted teachers expect you to know everything and so do the other gifted kids....we expect ourselves to be better than the white kids and know the stuff.” It is clear that this student is intentionally sabotaging her level of academic achievement by not asking her teacher for assistance. However, given the underlying reasons, she believed inattentiveness to be a viable defense mechanism. By failing to ask questions, she would appear to know the material being gone over in class; thus, protecting herself from being viewed as incapable of handling a gifted curriculum. When asked if it is embarrassing to ask questions in gifted classes, she replied with the following: “Yes
because the gifted teachers expect you to know everything and so do the other gifted kids.” Clearly, complying with these immense expectations as a function of being a gifted African American student may potentially have a detrimental impact on academic achievement, as evidenced by Angela’s relatively low G.P.A. (i.e., 83-86). However, it was an interesting that African American parents actually teach their children to disengage academically; “especially from teachers or counselors” according to [Samantha, female, ninth grade, 87-92 G.P.A.].

Students offered numerous examples of distancing themselves from their gifted identities in response to particular circumstances. For example, some students characterized “other” gifted students as “snobs” or “stuck up.” However, when describing themselves, some would say things like “I’m smart, but I’m real,” “being gifted doesn’t change me...I don’t think much of it” or “sometimes they get the wrong idea about the gifted program and think that everyone in it is a nerd”. Even though 11 out of 12 students mentioned that they are proud of their giftedness, distancing themselves from their gifted identities seemed like a reasonable response, when the majority of the students attended schools where African Americans identified as gifted are often ridiculed. For example, participants reported being accused of “acting White” by non-gifted students who felt that certain attributes, like being gifted or speaking Standard English, were not representative of Black people. This appeared to cause a certain degree of angst among the participants, resulting in attempts to befriend their non-gifted peers in order to gain acceptance from them. For example, students participated in extracurricular activities, such as drama, cheerleading, and football, with
non-gifted students as a means to prove that they were “not just another nerd” or acting White.

**Benefits of Gifted Identification.** Aside from offering explanations of the critical issues they faced and the means they chose to navigate them, students reported specific benefits as a result of being identified and participating in gifted education, and predicted that they would continue to receive certain benefits in the future, as well. The most frequently mentioned benefit was reported to be a challenging curriculum because they felt that they needed to be taught material that was on their level or higher.

Students also mentioned that they valued the encouragement and motivation provided by teachers who were well-trained in gifted education. For example, Samantha [female, 87-92 G.P.A.], who was, at the time of the study, accelerated into ninth grade at a magnet high school, described her high school experience in comparison to her previous schools as follows: “my school is trained for gifted students. My past [elementary and middle] schools were regular schools and regular teachers teaching un-regular kids.” Additionally, students mentioned that they enjoyed learning with peers whom they felt were their academic equals, as this was a unique opportunity to form a reciprocal relationship with peers where students are capable of teaching and learning from one another. Participants also reported that a challenging curriculum would help them become better prepared for other difficult challenges in the future, such as scoring well on the SAT.

Students also expected to benefit from their giftedness in numerous ways in the future. For instance, many of the students predicted that as a result of being a gifted
student, they will have increased options to choose their desired high schools, colleges, and careers of their choice. It was interesting that although students mentioned numerous benefits to being identified as gifted, no one in their middle schools informed of such benefits. According to Samantha [female, 87-92 G.P.A.], who was identified as gifted in second-grade, a lack of knowledge of the benefits of gifted education created feelings of resentment towards the program because she didn’t understand why she was being taken away from her friends in her “regular” classes. She reported that, over time, she made friends, “but there are some students in the gifted program who are different tht other people in gifted may look at as weird. Those people sometimes never make friends in the gifted program and they really dislike it.”

Perceptions of Non-gifted Students. Gifted students’ perceptions of non-gifted students were clearly documented. As mentioned earlier, non-gifted students tended to ridicule and ostracize gifted African American students. For example, there were certain qualities or behaviors that gifted Black students demonstrated that were stigmatized, such as speaking Standard English and excelling academically. Those students who express themselves in this manner were oftentimes reported to be classified as acting White and unaccepted by non-gifted students who do not display these same behaviors. Nevertheless, gifted students still wanted to befriend non-gifted students.

However, interestingly, respondents had a negative overall opinion of non-gifted students. For instance, many students characterized non-gifted Black students as “lazy,” “academically poor,” “ignorant,” and “ghetto.” These definitions of non-gifted African Americans were quite different from their definitions of non-gifted White students, who
were most often thought of as being influenced by hip-hop culture and having an
admiration for Blacks, in general.

5.1.2 Research Question 2

*How do gifted African American students perceive educators, such as school counselors? How do these perceptions differ on the basis of gender?*

_Perceptions of School Counselors._ Overall, students had negative perceptions of school counselors for various reasons. Some students mentioned that their school counselors did not validate their feelings. Others said that their school counselor was seen as a disciplinarian. Additionally, some respondents reported that they would rather have their school counselor work through their teachers as opposed to working directly with students because students had a better rapport with their teachers.

Many of the students had never met their school counselor or had substantial contact with them. However, this is not unreasonable considering that it was mentioned that Black families tend not to refer their children to seek help from their teachers and school counselors. Generally speaking, the students exhibited help-seeking behaviors that can be characterized as influenced by the individual strengths of students. For instance, not wanting to be a “burden” or a “whiner” was offered as legitimate reasons for not seeking assistance from school counselors. While others stated that they were “self motivated” and have “too much pride” to ask for help. To this end, it is worth mentioning again that it was suggested that parents of gifted African American students teach their children to be independent, which consists of instructing them to not seek the help of others.
There were a few students who reported that they would not be adverse to receiving help from their school counselors with such issues pertaining to sex, smoking, careers, and funding for college. It must be mentioned, however, that of those who expressed a desire to meet with their school counselors, the vast majority of them were females. In fact, all of the respondents reported that females visit the school counselor most often in their schools. Not surprisingly, females were also perceived as having “emotional issues,” which warranted meetings with a school counselor. As such, it is not difficult to assume the possibility that males may have viewed school counseling services as reserved for females with “problems” and thus, not for males.

Perceptions of Teachers and Other Educators. Students’ offered conflicting perceptions of teachers. Some students reported that they had to confront teachers who held stereotypical beliefs of the capabilities of gifted African American students. Females, in particular, felt that their teachers had low expectations of them because of their race as well as their gender; resulting in the utilization of academic disengagement tactics {i.e., putting head on the desk, refusing to ask for assistance) by some of the students.

Nevertheless, students seemed to have a stronger, more positive relationship with teachers, rather than school counselors, for various reasons. Most often, students mentioned that they were more comfortable with their teachers because they were more visible figures in their lives. This point is illustrated by Samantha [female, 87-92 G.P.A.] who states the following: “it would be weird going to someone you barely talk
to {school counselor} compared to a cool fun teacher you see and talk to everyday for an hour and a half.”

5.2 Conclusions

The aforementioned assumptions of the researcher were validated by the findings of the study:

1. African Americans in gifted education programs experience these programs differently from other students.

2. African American females may have a more difficult experience in gifted education, compared to their male peers.

3. Gifted African American students have a strong, positive racial identity.

4. Gifted African American students have low perceptions of educators, particularly school counselors.

The study’s participants gave numerous accounts of the precarious status of gifted African American students. Due to the interaction of their race and giftedness, it was abundantly clear that for them, the being An African American in a gifted education program is an experience that is quite different from the experiences of other students. Of particular interests are the reactions these students had to their environment, with many of them choosing to academically disengage—a tactic that was reported to originate from teachings in the home. Parents, in an attempt to help protect their children the perils of gifted education, may have taught them skills that could
adversely affect their children’s level of academic achievement—a stark contradiction to their intended purpose.

It is particularly noteworthy that females expressed far more difficulties than the males. Females were forced to endure teachers who had low perceptions of their academic ability as well as being thought of as “emotional” by their peers—a perception shaped by the fact that females, according to student responses, tended to visit with their school counselors most often. Nonetheless, taken as a whole, students had a low perception of educators, such as school counselors. Many of them reported that school counselors functioned to serve the needs of students with “problems.” Others, particularly females mentioned their displeasure with teachers’ “anti-intellectualism” or discouraging females from taking an interest in math and science. This point is further illustrated by Amanda [female, 93-100 G.P.A.], who states the following:

She [teacher] won't believe that I read Shakespeare or physics or anything more intellectual than "The Princess Diaries"(teen girl literature). Over spring break I did some research on cellular automata....she won't believe me. She doesn't do this to the boys even if they are lying...

5.3 Discussion and Implications

As previously mentioned, the current research literature in the field of gifted education is strikingly sparse pertaining to African American students. If this trend continues, solutions to the problem of underrepresentation of African Americans in gifted education programs may never be resolved. To that end, the findings of this study
have the potential to spark interest amongst educators and policymakers. This study has shed some light on this topic that has often been overshadowed by other subjects.

Taken as a whole, educators may find it difficult to effectively assist gifted African American students. Moreover, one cannot assume successful interactions between students and educators because they are of the same race. In fact, it could be argued that educators lack the necessary skills to work with these students, unless they have been trained explicitly in their needs. In fact, educators’ lack of understanding of gifted African American students was a common theme related to students’ overall low perceptions of them. As such, educators require more knowledge related to these students, as well as their perceptions of gifted education programming. Therefore, such individuals may be interested in the findings as a means to better understand these students.

According to the findings, gifted African American students are adopting harmful habits (i.e., gifted identity distancing and academic disengagement) in response to their environment. Obviously, these results will be of particular interest to educators as they who desire information on how to work more effectively with students exhibiting such behavior. Additionally, they may be interested in the meanings students attached to their experiences, because these meanings are commonly responsible for students’ subsequent actions (i.e., identity distancing) and inactions (i.e., disengagement). For example, being accused of acting White can potentially be very harmful to gifted African students. Being identified as acting White, these students may be subjected to ridicule by those students who view academic achievement as a quality
that should not be valued by African Americans. However, the converse of this concept lies in the notion of acting Black. In this case, gifted African American students who value education may view Black students whom they perceive as not valuing education to be “ghetto” or belonging to a lower class. If either of these notions (i.e., acting White or acting Black) are internalized by African American students, it may hinder any attempts to unite gifted students, who excel in school and who view academic achievement as a large component of their identity, with non-gifted students, who may value education but have not had the same level of academic success as gifted students. It is not difficult to assume the detrimental impact this may have on students who may have very little interaction with students of their own race, given the glaring underrepresentation of African American students in gifted programs. Educators may be aware of the obvious academic disengagement (Ogbu, 2003), but unaware of the specific meanings, processes, and contexts that may initiate such reactions. Thus, again, educators may find the results of this study to be of particular interest.

Educators, such as principals may also glean a lot from the findings of this study. In terms of developing interventions designed to aid students who academically disengage. For instance, principals who lack an understanding of the experiences of gifted African Americans, specifically, the critical issues they encounter on a daily basis, may think of African American student in deficit terms. If this is true, principals may assume that African American students who appear to be inattentive in class are either trying to be “difficult” or do not understand the material being taught. In response, she/he may react by disciplining the student, removing the student from gifted
programming, or refusing to admit the student to gifted programming. Moreover, as an authority figure in the school, the principal may unintentionally convey the message to school counselors, teachers, and others that African American students are unworthy of consideration for gifted education, resulting in the maintenance of the status quo—African American underrepresentation in gifted education programs.

It is important to consider dangerous implications of subscribing to color-blind racist ideological beliefs, particularly in the field of education. For instance, principals who harbor such beliefs may be remarkably effective in convincing members of school communities if their intentions are couched in color-blind racist frames (Bonilla-Silva, 2003) that are common in modern society. By doing so, the principal may give the impression that it is African Americans’ shortcomings and not biased practices that are keeping them out of gifted education programs. To this end, school principals, and school district administrators as a whole who are interested in eradicating gifted education representation discrepancies may be interested in the results of this study.

Finally, the topic of the U.S.’s need for students equipped to major in math and science in college, subsequently assuming positions that are highly technical in nature has been thoroughly addressed. As such, policymakers may find this study useful in the formation of new policies aimed at leveling the playing field between gifted African Americans and others who may not experience the same degree of difficulty in gifted education programs.
5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, several suggestions are provided for teachers, administrators, and parents, and school counselors. These recommendations are also offered to improve educational standard practices and policies.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Teachers

1. Every attempt should be made to include families in recruitment and retention efforts. The findings of this study suggest that parents have a powerful influence on students. As such, teachers must collaborate with other educators (e.g., school counselors, other teachers, administrators) in their schools to establish and maintain relationships with parents. Telephone calls, frequent notes, and family/social events at places and times that are convenient for parents must become a culture of the school in order to create a strong home-school alliance where parents are made to understand that they are integral parts of the education process;

2. Once a trusting relationship has been established, parents must be made aware of the negative impact that academic disengagement (Ogbu, 2003) can have on the academic achievement of students. Moreover, teachers should collaborate with other educators (e.g., school counselors and administrators) to inform parents of their role they may play—albeit unknowingly—in teaching their children such harmful practices.
3. According to the findings of this study, many gifted African American students chose to distance themselves from their gifted identities in order to gain acceptance from non-gifted students. Therefore, teachers should collaborate with other educators (e.g., school counselors, principals, etc.) to develop activities aimed at increasing the opportunities for gifted and non-gifted students to interact with one another (i.e., extracurricular activities) as this was found to be effective in creating gifted/non-gifted friendships.

4. Teachers should participate in professional development training activities in order to participate in growth-enhancing activities aimed at increasing their awareness of personal beliefs regarding the potential of African American students. In addition, professional development activities may be used to learn more about the needs of gifted African American students.

5. Teachers should improve teacher-student and student-student relationships. Students reported that they confronted many racial and gender specific stereotypes in and out of the classroom (e.g., low teacher expectations, accusations of acting White). Therefore, teachers should become sensitive to potential racial and gender biases and examine how such biases may impact their teaching styles, expectations, and general interactions with students. Additionally, teachers should work with other educators to improve Black-White student relationships, as Black students also tended to have stereotypical views of what it means to be White.
6. Teachers should also work proactively with other educators (i.e., school counselors and principals) and parents to consistently inform students of the tangible benefits of gifted education programming. By doing so, educators may instill a sense of pride in giftedness, which may combat gifted African American students’ need to distance themselves from their gifted identity.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Principals

1. Principals should closely monitor representation in gifted education programs. They should use data to identify disparities in gifted education enrollment according to race and gender. If students are not adequately represented, steps should be taken to address the problem.

2. Principals should make it a priority to establish times for gifted and non-gifted students to intermingle. This would help normalize gifted students and reduce the angst associated with standing out.

3. Principals should recruit school personnel that have been trained to meet the unique needs of gifted African American students. In addition, principals must establish regularly scheduled professional development training sessions for school personnel (e.g., teachers and school counselors) to increase their understanding of the actions and inactions of gifted African American students.

5.4.3 Recommendations for Parents

1. Parents should promote academic engagement. In order to do so, parents can offer encouragement to their children and urge them to ask them for assistance when necessary. Parents should work with educators to normalize visits to the
school counselor, particularly. By encouraging their children, students may be more apt to participate in gifted education programming.

5.4.4 Recommendations for School Counselors

1. School counselors should collaborate with fellow educators (e.g., teachers, and principals) to develop culturally sensitive recruitment and retention practices.

2. School counselors should be proactive about alerting all students in their schools concerning the benefits of gifted education. Hopefully, this tactic will assist in normalizing gifted education and reduce the stigma associated with giftedness.

3. School counselors should advocate for the infusion of multicultural content in school curricula. If students are exposed to people operating in non-traditional roles, this may reduce the generalizations associated with what it means to be of a certain race and/or gender.

4. School counselors should advocate for increased socialization opportunities for gifted and non-gifted students.

5. School counselors should be aware of gifted African American students’ concerns regarding the invisibility of school counselors. It is imperative that they be proactive about developing innovative ways to make their presence felt throughout the school. Additionally, school counselors should always be seen interacting with students of different genders, races, and academic levels, in order to help prevent broad generalizations of who receives counseling services most often.
6. Given that gifted African American students seemed to feel more comfortable with teachers, school counselors may try inviting teachers into counseling programming as a means to build rapport.

7. It is important that school counselors are aware of the difficulties gifted African American students experience with race at the middle school level. Therefore, it is important that they are aware of these students’ perceptions in order to reduce this psychological strain at the high school level. Students may also be fearful of leaving the inclusive environment, of their middle school gifted classrooms to enter a more open high school environment where they will interact more closely with non-gifted students on a regular basis. It is important that school counselors are proactive by developing programs designed to ease the students’ transition to high school as well as reduce their discomfort with race.

8. School counselors should be vigilant in their attempts to build rapport with gifted African American students. One way to do this is to gain the trust of parents by showing how school counseling services are of use to their child. When school counselors earn the respect of parents, they are more likely to serve a vetting function and recommend school counseling services to their children.

9. Given the finding that females visit the school counselor more often for “emotional problems,” school counselors should closely monitor behavior records, while proactively developing strategies (e.g., anger management groups and/or peer helping programs) to reduce such concerns.
5.5 Limitations and Future Directions

This study offers detailed information regarding the lives of gifted African American students. However, only the perceptions of the students were collected. The attitudes of parents, school counselors, and principals may have provided insightful information and would have strengthened the findings of the study. Furthermore, observations of the gifted education classroom environment would have yielded valuable information, as it would have given the researcher first-hand knowledge of participants’ worlds. However, it was not feasible.

Future research studies should focus on gathering data of others involved with gifted African American students (i.e., parents, teachers, principals, etc.). This would assist in giving a more complete portrait of these students. More specifically, this information would provide a more accurate depiction of these students’ lives outside of the school environment. For example, a study could be conducted on parents’ perceptions of parenting a gifted African American student. This would shed light on distinct practices of African American parents and their perceptions of the factors that impact the academic achievement of gifted African American students. Parents’ perceptions may then be compared to their children’s, in an attempt to explore the congruence between parents’ and students’ perceptions of effective parenting practices.

In terms of additional in-school information, teachers’ perceptions of gifted African Americans may be collected. This would be valuable in terms of providing information on practices they perceive to be most effective in their work with gifted African American students. Additionally, replication studies should contain the
following information: (a) How students were identified as gifted?; (b) What grade were students first identified as gifted?; (c) What type of gifted program were they involved in (e.g., pull-out; self-contained, etc.)?; (d) What were the specific gifted classroom demographics? Each of the pieces of information has the potential to render valuable information.

Follow-up studies should be conducted with gifted African American students to explore the issues encountered when transitioning from middle school to high school. These studies would demonstrate how or if these students’ perceptions and help-seeking behaviors change over time. A thorough description of the high school as a whole, as well as its gifted education programming, should be offered in this study because it may produce information pertaining to the decisions students make about participating in gifted education programs. The findings of this study may assist middle and high school counselors in developing more collaborative efforts in advance of students’ arrival in the high school environment.

A quantitative measure grounded in the qualitative findings could also be developed to evaluate students’ specific perceptions of their school counselors. This measure could then be used by school counselors to gather useful information related to the services that gifted African American students are more apt to seek from their school counselors. School counselors would then be armed with information describing student needs and the likelihood they are to seek out school counseling services, which would also aid in the creation of personalized, clearly defined advocacy efforts on behalf of school counselors in individual schools.
5.6 Final Thoughts

CRT, at its core, is concerned with recognizing the power of race and the undeniable impact racism has on our daily lives. As such, CRT was quite useful in conducting this study because it provided a lens to shed light on the precarious status of African American students in gifted education. CRT, in conjunction with the lens of interpretivism, enabled the researcher to explore the meanings these students attach to their race, giftedness, and gender, which, in turn, shaped their actions and inactions in response to numerous hidden obstacles.


Steele, C. M. (2003). Stereotype threat and African American student achievement. In T. Perry, C. Steele, & A. G. Hilliard (Eds.), *Young, gifted, and African American* (pp. 109-130.).


APPENDIX A

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
## Participant Demographic Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>GENDER</th>
<th>AGE</th>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>GPA</th>
<th>ADV. COURSES TAKEN</th>
<th>EASIEST CLASS</th>
<th>HARDEST CLASS</th>
<th>EDUCATIONAL GOALS</th>
<th>CAREER GOALS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>83-86</td>
<td>AP English &amp; Science</td>
<td>English History</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>College; creative writing &amp; physiology major</td>
<td>Establish own business for abused or mistreated teens</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amanda</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>Algebra in 7th grade; Geometry in 8th grade</td>
<td>English B Science</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Ph.D. &amp; post-doc in particle physics</td>
<td>Physics professor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brian</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>Honors Algebra I &amp; Geometry; Gifted Language, Science &amp; Geography</td>
<td>Language, Math B Science Geography</td>
<td></td>
<td>Get no “C’s” and keep grades up</td>
<td>NFL player or a Lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>87-92</td>
<td>Honors Algebra I &amp; Geometry; Integrated Science &amp; French II</td>
<td>Language Arts &amp; Social Studies Geometry &amp; French</td>
<td></td>
<td>To go to college for 4 years on a scholarship</td>
<td>A good steady job and an above average living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>Math &amp; English</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>4-year college degree or more</td>
<td>Photographer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cortland</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>Honors Algebra I; All gifted classes</td>
<td>All classes</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Straight “A’s”; Attend MIT on a full scholarship</td>
<td>Comp. Programmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>87-92</td>
<td>Honors Algebra I; Geometry; Biology; English I; Integrated Science; World History</td>
<td>All except Honors World History World History</td>
<td></td>
<td>Graduate HS with a 3.7, go to college</td>
<td>pediatrician, surgeon, or a lawyer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shanice</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>87-92</td>
<td>Honors Language Arts &amp; Geometry; Gifted Language Arts</td>
<td>Science B History</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Advanced degree in psychology</td>
<td>Actress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shariff</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>93-100</td>
<td>Algebra, English, Science, Business Tech</td>
<td>Math, Science &amp; PE</td>
<td>English B History</td>
<td>Graduate from a 4-yr college</td>
<td>NBA player; Computer Technician, or Doctor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mason</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>87-92</td>
<td>All gifted classes</td>
<td>Math</td>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Graduate from a 4-yr college</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>SCHOOL SIZE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Angela</td>
<td>Mostly Black</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>M/F</td>
<td>M-HS diploma; F-Some college</td>
<td>939</td>
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<td>63%</td>
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<td>Amanda</td>
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<td>M/F</td>
<td>M-some grad. or prof. school; F- Grad. or prof. degree</td>
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<td>Carlos</td>
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<td>M/F</td>
<td>M-Bus. Or Trade School degree; F-Bus. Or Trade school degree</td>
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<td>M-4-yr degree; F-4-yr degree</td>
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<td>Samantha</td>
<td>½ Black &amp; ½ White</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M-some college; F-HS diploma</td>
<td>613</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>28%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shanice</td>
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<td>Suburban</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M-Grad or Prof degree; F-Grad. Or Prof degree</td>
<td>1558</td>
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APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL
General School Counseling Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences

What do you think school counselors are supposed to do?

What experiences have you had with your school counselor? In school? Within your family? Within your community?

Who seeks the help of school counselors the most in your school: Gifted students? Non-gifted students? African American students? White students? Female students? Male students?

Who do you think your school counselor cares the most about in your school: Gifted students? Non-gifted students? African American students? White students? Female students? Male students?

What do you like the most about your school counselor? Least?

What do you think your school counselor likes the most about you? Dislikes?

Do you think that your school counselor has confidence in you? Why or why not?

School Counseling Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences - Academic

What are your most important academic needs?

How are your academic needs different from other gifted students? African American students? White students? Female/male students?

How are your needs like non-gifted students? African American students? White students? Female/male students?

How do you feel about talking to your school counselor about an academic problem? Please explain.

How helpful is your school counselor in meeting your academic needs?

How could your school counselor be more helpful in meeting your academic needs?

School Counseling Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences - Career
What are your career goals? How did you come to choose that as your career goal?

What do you like the most about that career? What do you like least about that career?

What will be most difficult about meeting your career goal?

What do you need from your school counselor to meet your career goals? What will you need from your school counselor in high school to meet your career goals?

How are your career goals like non-gifted students? African American students? White students? Female/male students?

How helpful is your school counselor in helping you to meet your career goals?

How could your school counselor be more helpful in helping you to meet your career goals?

School Counseling Perceptions, Attitudes, and Experiences – Personal/Social

What has it been like to be a gifted student in your school? What is the best about it? What is the worst about it?

Are you proud to be gifted? Why or why not?

What has it been like to be an African American student in your school? What is the best about it? What is the worst about it?

Are you proud to be African American? Why or why not?

What is it like to be a female/male in your school? What is the best about it? What is the worst about it?

Are you proud to be a female/male? Why or why not?

What are your needs as a gifted student? As an African American student? As a female/male student?

Are your needs different from non-gifted students? Non-gifted African American students? White students? Female/male students? Why or why not?
What do you think will be more difficult for you in high school: Being a gifted student, African American student, or a female/male student? Please explain.

What do you need from your school counselor the most: Help with being a gifted student, being African American, or being a female/male? Please explain.

What do you need from your school counselor the most in high school: Help with being a gifted student, being African American, or being a female/male? Please explain.

To what extent is your school counselor helpful to you as a gifted student? As an African American student? As a female/male? Please explain.

How could your school counselor be more helpful to you as a gifted student? As an African American student? As a female/male? Please explain.
APPENDIX C

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH TEAM MEMBERS
Description of Research Team Members

Principal Researcher # 1: Malik S. Henfield

The principal researcher of this study is an African American male is currently a faculty member in the counselor education program at The University of Iowa. He has played an instrumental role in transforming their school counseling master’s degree program into the first program in the country to offer a master’s degree in school counseling with an emphasis in gifted education. He has 3 years experience as an academic counselor for gifted students through the Center for Talented Youth summer program—which is widely considered to be one of the top summer programs for gifted students in the world.

Research Team Member # 2:

Research team member #2 is an African American female with one year of experience as a counselor educator and school counseling program coordinator. She is experienced in transcription and identification of emergent themes.

Research Team Member #3:

Research team member #3 is a Caucasian female with 10+ years in gifted education as a teacher and program administrator. She is experienced in transcription and identification of emergent themes.
Emerging Codes: Categories and Subcode Definitions

Benefits of Being Identified as Gifted – Present (BGP)
Students’ perceptions of the present benefits associated with being labeled as gifted.

- **Challenging (CHA)**
  Responses related to the benefits of a challenging curriculum.
- **Encouragement (ENC)**
  Responses related to the encouragement received from teachers.
- **Motivation (MOT)**
  Responses related to the motivation received from teachers.
- **Learn with Equally Skilled Peers (ESPP)**
  Responses related to learning with students of equal skill in the present.
- **Well-trained Gifted Teachers (WGT)**
  Responses related to being taught by teachers who were trained in giftedness.
- **Other___________

Benefits of Being Identified as Gifted – Future (BGF)
Students’ perceptions of the future benefits associated with being labeled as gifted.

- **Adjustment Ease (AE)**
  Responses related to the ease of adjustment to higher levels of education.
- **Scholarships (SC)**
  Responses related to scholarships for college.
- **Learn with Equally Skilled Peers (ESPF)**
  Responses related to learning with students of equal skill in the future.
- **Increased High School Options (IHOSO)**
  Responses related to multiple high school choices.
- **Increased College (ICOO)**
  Responses related to multiple college choices.
- **Increased Career Options (ICAO)**
  Responses related to multiple career choices.
- **Better Prepared for College (BPC)**
  Responses related to being better prepared for college.
- **SAT Preparation (SAT)**
  Responses related to being better prepared to take the SAT.
- **Other___________

Standing Out (SOP)
Students’ positive perceptions due to being noticed for being one of the few gifted African Americans in their schools.

- **Recognition for Intelligence (RI)**
  Students reported that they enjoyed being recognized as being intelligent.
• **Role Model (RMP)**  
Students viewed being a role model to other African American students as positive.

**Standing Out (SON)**  
Students’ negative perceptions due to being noticed for being one of the few gifted African Americans in their schools.

• **Role Model (RMP)**  
Students viewed being a role model to other African American students as negative.

• **Equal Treatment**  
Students wanted to be treated like everyone else in the school; didn’t want to stand out.

• **Other_______________**

**Gifted Stigma (STM)**

• **Smart Kid (SK)**  
Students reported being known as the smart kid.

• **Nerd (NE)**  
Students reported being known as nerds.

• **Snobby (SN)**  
Students reported being known as snobs.

• **Workaholics (WO)**  
Students reported being known as workaholics.

• **Stressed (STR)**  
Students reported being known as stressed out.

**Negative Perceptions of Non-gifted Students (NPNS)**

• **Unaccepting of giftedness (UG)**

• **Unwilling to work (UW)**

• **Don’t care for school (DCS)**

**Positive Perceptions of Non-Gifted Students (PPNS)**

• **Normal (NM)**  
Non-gifted students were perceived to be “normal” or “regular” students.

**Positive Perceptions of Females (PPF)**

• **High Expectations (HE)**
• Smarter Than Boys (SB)

Negative Perceptions of Females (NPF)

• Fitting In (FI)
  Females feeling pressured to conform to expectations made of them.
• Anti-intellectualism (AI)
  Females being discouraged from exercising their intellectual identities.

Most Difficult Identity (MDI)

• Gender (MGD)
• Race (MRC)
• Giftedness (MGN)

Least Difficult Identity (LDI)

• Gender (LGD)
• Race (LRC)
• Giftedness (LGN)

Gifted Black Difficulty (GBD)

• Confronting Stereotypes (CS)
• No Intellectual Role Models (NIRM)
• Pressure to Please Teachers (PPT)
• Pressure to Please Parents (PPP)

Acting White (BAW)

• Happy
• Proper
• Cracker
• “Think you’re smart”
• Nerd
• Articulate
• Snobby
• Happy – No problems
• Opposite of Acting Black
• Preppy
• Rock
• Pop
• Doing well in school
• Focused
• Acceptable to ask for help

Whites Acting Black (WAB)

• Get in trouble for attention
• Admiration for Blacks
• Gangsta
• Mass media influence
• Profanity
• Slang

Blacks Acting Black (BAB)

• Academically poor
• Slower than White students
• Music
• Profanity
• Ignorant
• Low grades
• Ghetto
• Ebonics
• Acting stupid
• Slurred speech

Help-seeking Behaviors (HSB)

• Don’t want to be a burden
• Too much pride
• Self-motivated

Desired Role of School Counselor (DRSC)

• Work through Teacher (WT)
• Friend (FR)

Negative Perceptions of School Counselors (NPSC)

• Unfamiliar with school counselor
• Seen as a disciplinarian
• Doesn’t validate students’ feelings
APPENDIX E

CODING WORKSHEET
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APPENDIX F

IRB APPROVAL
IRB ID #: 200602762
To: Malik Henfield
From: IRB-02 DHHS Registration # IRB00000100, Univ of Iowa, DHHS Federalwide Assurance # FWA00003007
Re: Gifted African Americans’ Perceptions of School Counselor Utility

Approval Date: 03/28/06
Next IRB Approval Due on or Before: 03/28/07

Type of Application: New Project
Type of Application Review: Full Board:
Populations: Meeting Date: Expedited
☑ Children
☐ Prisoners
☐ Pregnant Women,
☐ Exempt

Source of Support:

This approval has been electronically signed by IRB Chair:
Kristine Fitch, PHD
03/28/06 0815

IRB Approval: IRB approval indicates that this project meets the regulatory requirements for the protection of human subjects. IRB approval does not absolve the principal investigator from complying with other institutional, collegiate, or departmental policies or procedures.

Agency Notification: If this is a New Project or Continuing Review application and the project is funded by an external government or non-profit agency, the original HHS 310 form, “Protection of Human Subjects Assurance Identification/IRB Certification/Declaration of Exemption,” has been forwarded to the UI Division of Sponsored Programs, 100 Gilmore Hall, for appropriate action. You will receive a signed copy from Sponsored Programs.

Recruitment/Consent: Your IRB application has been approved for recruitment of subjects not to exceed the number indicated on your application form. If you are using written informed consent, the IRB-approved and stamped Informed Consent Document(s) are attached. Please make copies from the attached “masters” for subjects to sign when agreeing to participate. The original signed Informed Consent Document should be placed in your research files. A copy of
the Informed Consent Document should be given to the subject. (A copy of the signed Informed Consent Document should be given to the subject if your Consent contains a HIPAA authorization section.) If hospital/clinic patients are being enrolled, a copy of the signed Informed Consent Document should be placed in the subject’s chart, unless a Record of Consent form was approved by the IRB.

Continuing Review: Federal regulations require that the IRB re-approve research projects at intervals appropriate to the degree of risk, but no less than once per year. This process is called “continuing review.” Your project “expires” on the date indicated on the preceding page (“Next IRB Approval Due on or Before”). You must obtain your next IRB approval of this project on or before that expiration date. You are responsible for submitting a Continuing Review application in sufficient time for approval before the expiration date, however the HSO will send a reminder notice approximately 60 and 30 days prior to the expiration date.

Modifications: Any change in this research project or materials must be submitted on a Modification application to the IRB for prior review and approval, except when a change is necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects. Modifications include but are not limited to: changing the protocol or study procedures, changing investigators or funding sources, changing the Informed Consent Document, increasing the anticipated total number of subjects from what was originally approved, or adding any new materials (e.g., letters to subjects, ads, questionnaires).

Unanticipated Problems Involving Risks: You must promptly report to the IRB any serious and/or unexpected adverse experience, as defined in the UI Investigator’s Guide, and any other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others. Depending on the type of project, either the Serious and/or Unexpected Adverse Experience Form or the Modification application form may be used for reporting to the IRB.

Audits/Record-Keeping: Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation of your project. Federal and University policies require that all research records be maintained for a period of three (3) years following the close of the research project. For research that involves drugs or devices seeking FDA approval, the research records must be kept for a period of three years after the FDA has taken final action on the marketing application.

Additional Information: Complete information regarding research involving human subjects at The University of Iowa is available in the “Investigator’s Guide to Human Subjects Research.” Research investigators are expected to comply with these policies and procedures, and to be familiar with the University’s Federalwide Assurance, the Belmont Report, 45CFR46, and other applicable regulations prior to conducting the research. These documents and IRB application and related forms are available on the Human Subjects Office website or are available by calling 319-335-6564.